

Ibrahim Parlak gets 3-month reprieve as fight to avoid deportation looms



Ibrahim Parlak answers questions after arriving at his Cafe Gulistan restaurant Friday, June 3, 2005, in Harbert, after he was jailed for 10 months while the U.S. government sought his deportation on terrorism charges (AP Photo/South Bend Tribune)



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HARBERT, MI – In the past, U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, and now-retired U.S. Sen. Carl Levin have supported legislation that would grant [Ibrahim Parlak](#) permanent residency here.

Despite those efforts, Ibrahim Parlak finds himself, once again, on the brink of possibly being deported.

Parlak, a Kurdish immigrant from Turkey who runs Café Gulistan in Harbert, had a deferral of his deportation that was set to expire at midnight on Thursday.

Early Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security granted Parlak a 90-day extension of that deferral as he and his attorney, Robert Carpenter, seek relief from the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals.

Parlak, prior to opening his restaurant in Harbert in Berrien County, ran a Café Gulistan in downtown Kalamazoo until it closed in 2002.

"It's definitely welcome news because it allows the system to operate the way it's supposed to operate with a full opportunity for both sides to address the issue," Carpenter said of the extension of Parlak's deferral. "That's the way it ought to be. It's certainly not the ultimate news that we hope to hear."

Carpenter and Parlak are seeking to have Parlak's deportation permanently deferred to ensure that he won't be sent back to Turkey. Parlak immigrated to the United States in 1991 after being convicted in Turkey on charges related to his support of the Kurdish separatist movement.

Carpenter said he filed a motion on Parlak's behalf on Tuesday with the Board of Immigration Appeals seeking to have Parlak's case reopened and re-examined with the hope that Parlak will not be deported.

The filing of the motion, Carpenter said, came after he got word last week "that removal efforts were afoot" by Turkey and the U.S. governments.

Parlak and his attorney contend that if Parlak is deported, he is sure to meet harm in Turkey. Carpenter said that since at least Saturday, there have been reports published in Turkish newspapers about Parlak's possible return and the government's intent to punish him.

"This gives us a chance to take a breather and accumulate the evidence that's out there that this isn't him trying to delay anything, this is him trying to save his life," Carpenter said.

The news about possible deportation is the latest development for Parlak in a case that has spanned more than 10 years.

Parlak was granted asylum in the U.S. in 1992, but efforts by U.S. immigration officials to deport him began in 2004 because of Parlak's previous ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in Turkey. PKK was classified as a terrorist group by the U.S. Department of State in 1997.

At the time, officials with the Department of Homeland Security contended that Parlak failed to disclose details about his activities with PKK in his original application for asylum and left out information about his conviction in Turkey for his alleged role in a 1988 incident involving a firefight on the Syrian-Turkish border during which two Turkish soldiers were killed.

In August 2004, FBI agents arrested Parlak in St. Joseph and he was held for 10 months in the Calhoun County Jail before a federal judge ordered his release.

Parlak has denied any involvement in the killing of the two Turkish soldiers in 1988 and Carpenter said his client has disavowed having any involvement with PKK. Parlak has said previously that after his capture in Turkey he was tortured and served two years in a Turkish jail for his Kurdish separatist activities.

In 2004, immigration officials asked Turkey to allow Parlak back into the country but Turkey had banned Parlak for his activities with the Kurds and withdrew his citizenship in 2002.

In 2010, the Department of Homeland Security granted Parlak a two-year deferral from deportation and Carpenter said deferrals followed each year after 2012.

Both Levin and Upton have sponsored legislation that would have given Parlak permanent residency in the U.S.

The introduction of the bills, [according to a report Wednesday in the Chicago Tribune](#), blocked actions to deport Parlak.

Levin has since retired and, according to the Tribune's report, Upton's bill is still in committee in the U.S. House. [The Tribune report said](#) Michigan's current senators, Democrats Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters have not sponsored legislation for Parlak.

Carpenter contends that the U.S. and Turkey have now been working "behind the scenes" to get Parlak deported and that U.S. officials have acquired a travel document from Turkey that makes Parlak "fully removable."

It is a move Carpenter hopes to prevent, citing that the "human rights situation" in Turkey has deteriorated significantly and reached "epidemic violent levels."

Carpenter said it his belief that the U.S. has "an international obligation" to reopen Parlak's case under the Convention against Torture.

Carpenter said he has not heard anything yet from the Board of Immigration Appeals about whether it will reopen Parlak's case. He said he is hopeful that the body will, at least, delay Parlak's deportation beyond the 90-day extension granted by Homeland Security officials while his motion is pending.

"I would hope the government would agree to reopen (his case) to meet its requirements of the (Convention against Torture)," Carpenter said. "This isn't a game, this is someone's life."

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