

Editorial: DHS hounding of Mich. man is a mistake

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Ibrahim Parlak in 2005. AP Photo/South Bend Tribune, Gene D. Kaiser

Somebody should tell the U.S. government to stop coming after Ibrahim Parlak, who has run a popular Middle Eastern restaurant in Michigan's Harbor Country since he came to America from Turkey and was granted asylum in 1991.

Lots of influential figures have rallied around Parlak over the years, including former U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., U.S. Rep Fred Upton, R-Mich., U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., author Alex Kotlowitz, and Chicago journalists Carol Marin and the late Roger Ebert.

His legal team includes John Smietanka, the former United States attorney for Western Michigan, appointed by presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and Anne Buckleitner, former counsel to the FBI in areas of counter-intelligence and terrorism.

Parlak has been a model immigrant and is well respected in his community. But something shadowy in the federal bureaucracy keeps labeling Parlak as a terrorist, as if the government just can't admit it's been wrong.

He spent 10 months in jail in 2004-05, until a judge freed him. Now, his lawyers worry he might be whisked away on Dec. 23 under an existing removal order. That would be unconscionable.

Parlak is told that the U.S. has obtained travel documents to Turkey for him. If he signs them, he could be put on a plane to Turkey. If he refuses, he violates his order of supervision.

Here's the shadowy part: Parlak's lawyers say they've received a back-channel offer of a two-year extension on his authorization to remain in America if he refuses to sign the travel documents. But no one will put anything in writing. Is he being set up? No one knows.

The supposed evidence tying Parlak to a Kurdish organization — one that was reclassified a terrorist outfit after he was already in America — comes through a now discredited and disbanded Turkish military tribunal that extracted statements via torture. No one vouches for the tribunal, but somehow its work lives on.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson ought to step in and clear this up. Or, as Geoffrey Stone of the University of Chicago law school recommends, President Barack Obama should issue Parlak a presidential pardon.

Parlak is no terrorist. And the government should stop acting as if he is.