

This is a troubling, but moving story. It is about Ibrahim Parlak, a Kurd born in a small farming village in southeast Turkey in 1962. Being a Kurd in Turkey is not easy. As a minority ethnic and religious group, Kurds in Turkey have historically been subjected to rampant discrimination, oppression and violence. As a high school student, Parlak was imprisoned for three months in a military jail for participating in humanitarian activities designed to help his people. Because he was targeted by the Turkish police and military for repeated investigation and interrogation, he left Turkey still as a young man to continue his education in Europe.

Shortly thereafter, there was a military coup in Turkey, and the Turkish consulate revoked Parlak's passport. But things were much worse for the Kurds in Turkey. Many of his friends and family members were taken away by the authorities, and no one knew what had happened to them. Parlak and other Kurdish students in Europe organized humanitarian efforts to bring awareness to the human rights abuses in Turkey.

After seven years in Europe, Parlak decided to return to Turkey where he hoped he could do more good for his people. Because he no longer had a Turkish passport, he accepted help from a separatist organization known as the PKK in his effort to re-enter the country. He was soon arrested by the Turkish military, however, and subjected to a month of brutal torture, during which he "confessed" to whatever was demanded of him. He then served over one-and-a-half years in a Turkish prison for "separatism."

After he was released, he fled to the United States in 1991 and promptly filed a petition for asylum, which was granted the following year based on his "well-founded fear of persecution." His petition disclosed in detail his arrest, detention, torture and imprisonment in Turkey. Over the course of the next decade, Parlak became a model immigrant. He settled in a small town in southwestern Michigan, opened a highly successful restaurant, became a respected and much valued member of his community, and had an American-born daughter.

As soon as he was legally able, Parlak eagerly applied for naturalization in 1998. As Parlak has observed, America provided him "with the opportunity to become someone." America is a place where "if you live by the rules and work hard, . . . dreams can come true."

Then came 9/11, and everything changed. Because the PKK had been designated a terrorist organization in 1997 -- a decade *after* the PKK had helped Parlak return to his homeland -- he suddenly came under suspicion by the Bush administration. His naturalization petition was denied and, astonishingly, the Bush administration initiated deportation proceedings against him. In 2004, he was imprisoned without bail, awaiting deportation. His friends and neighbors rallied to his support by the hundreds, and after ten months in prison a federal judge declared his detention unconstitutional.

Undaunted, the Bush administration continued to press for deportation on the remarkable ground that Parlak had not disclosed his arrest in Turkey on his naturalization petition. This is an Alice in Wonderland argument, given that Parlak's arrest, torture and

imprisonment in Turkey were very well known to the Immigration and Naturalization Service -- they were, after all, the very *reason* for the initial grant of asylum.

Nonetheless, the immigration officials ordered his removal, and last summer a sharply divided federal court of appeals, granting extraordinary deference to the immigration officials, affirmed the order of removal. The dissenting judge, the only judge on the three-judge panel not appointed by President Bush, rightly rebuked the immigration proceedings in the case as "a sad remnant of an era of paranoid, overzealous, error-riddled and misguided anti-terrorism and immigration enforcement that has now gone by the wayside." Except, that is, for Ibrahim Parlak, who remains caught in an excruciatingly painful time-warp.

Facing deportation from his home of twenty years, Parlak continues to receive the generous support of his many admirers who know and respect him. These include not only neighbors, friends, ministers, and patrons of his restaurant, but also Senator Carl Levin, Congressman Fred Upton, and many members of the Michigan legislature. Indeed, a few weeks ago the Michigan senate passed a resolution in support of Parlak's cause. But time is running out. Parlak has exhausted his legal appeals. This spring, at almost the last moment, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano approved a renewable two-year deferral for Parlak.

This was a gracious and heroic step, and Parlak, his family and his supporters are deeply grateful. But a deferral is just that - a deferral. It leaves Parlak living under the continuing threat of deportation, with little he can do legally to forestall that outcome. Living with that threat hanging over his head every day for almost a decade must truly be a *nightmare*.

What Secretary Napolitano has done is an act of decency, justice and good judgment. But it is time now for the Obama administration to bring this sorry episode to a close. For twenty years, Ibrahim Parlak has been an exemplary resident of our nation. There is no proof that Parlak ever did anything wrong -- other than that obtained through torture by the Turkish Security Court -- a body so reviled for its practices that Turkey was forced to close it as a condition of admission to the European Union. Let us move beyond the "overzealous" and sometimes cruel "anti-terrorism" of the Bush administration, and display the same spirit of humanity, goodness and decency that got Ibrahim Parlak in this mess to begin with.