



Statement of Masooda Rahman
June 27, 2005

Good morning. My name is Masooda Rahman. I was born and raised in Canada, and went to college and received my Bachelor of Arts here in the Chicago area. My husband and I were married in 1998, we have two children and live in Chicago's western suburbs.

On May 8th, when my husband Akif was led away by Border Guards, I did not imagine that he would be held separate from us for six hours. My deep concern about Akif was mixed with anxiety about the conditions under which our children – Zakareeya, age 4, and Nurah, who is not yet 2 – and I were being held.

As Akif was led away by officers, Zakareeya immediately asked where his father was being taken, and I told him that his father was going to a business meeting. It was difficult to explain what was happening, even though I knew that Akif had been detained unnecessarily before. I thought this stop would be very brief. But it soon became clear that was not the case. As the hours stretched on I became increasingly anxious and upset.

The agent who first stopped us instructed me to move our car into a parking lot. Another agent met us at the parking lot, and directed us to a building where we were to wait. At this point, it was clear to me that we also were being detained.

Inside the building, we were held in a small, dirty waiting room. It was a completely inappropriate space for young children to be held for six hours. The children were fidgety and anxious, with nothing to distract their attention.

The situation was intimidating and miserable. We were forced to ask permission in order to use a locked bathroom. That bathroom had no changing table and the floor was grossly unsanitary. I had to change Nurah while she stood up – not an easy feat in a small bathroom.

There was a sign in the waiting room prohibiting cell phone calls. Officers ordered people not to use their cell phones. After we'd been held for some hours, I asked if I could make a single phone call – I wanted to phone our family and tell them what was happening as the situation persisted. I knew we would be late in returning to Chicago and that our family would be very worried about us. An officer refused my request.

To make matters worse, I did not have food for the children. A female officer finally offered me some animal crackers and Gatorade. Anyone who ever has been alone with two hungry young children will recognize that a box of animal crackers did not solve their problem. We were planning to visit a restaurant in Detroit – a place we regularly visit when we are driving home from Canada. The children were just a few minutes from getting something to eat when we were stopped; now they were hungry, bored, tired, dirty and overwrought.

Most of all, I was worried about Akif. Zakareeya repeatedly asked for his father. Every hour I asked an officer about Akif, where he was and how much longer the detention might be expected to last. I knew from Akif's descriptions of his previous experiences that these detentions could be frustrating and harassing.

When Akif was finally released, I could see that he was upset. When he later told me what happened, I was angry. I simply did not understand how an American citizen – an innocent American citizen – could be detained in this way because of misidentification.

It is impossible to separate my children and me from this sad event. We are like any other young American family. My husband works hard, and we both spend a lot of time and energy caring for and thinking about our children. To us, family comes first and our foremost goal is building a good quality of life for our children.

We try to treat everyone with respect and dignity, to treat people as individuals and to act with tolerance and understanding of those who are different than our family. These are our values and we believe these are fundamental American values. I believe the government must also act in accord with these values. It should act quickly to make sure this does not occur again to our family or to any other innocent family.

I hope this lawsuit will correct this inequity for my husband and for others.