



All-girl Afghani robotics team denied entry to United States

July 6, 2017

Students from The Gambia and Afghanistan were recently denied visas to compete in the [FIRST Global](#) worldwide robotics competition, according to reports from [Reuters](#) and [Al Jazeera](#).

The new development has angered Gambian government, which argues that each of the students already paid Ksh 17,000 (US\$170) for their visas, money that their parents reportedly toiled to raise, only to be denied opportunity to travel to U.S. for a crucial event.

The Gambia team is not alone.

A team from The Gambia also failed to gain visas.

The U.S. Embassy in Banjul could not immediately be reached for comment. The new administration, inaugurated in January, has promised widespread democratic reforms.

Robotics of the two teams will still be part of the competition.

"We will go for an interview and hope for the best", he said. Each student had to pay a fee of more than \$160 for the visas and travel for the interviews.

For months, the team has worked on a machine that sorts balls as part of an effort to simulate solutions for separating contaminants from water.

FIRST Global holds the annual robotics competition to encourage learning in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM, around the world. All three Muslim-majority countries are on President Donald Trump's travel ban.

The event takes place in Washington, D.C. later this month.

Darboe said that they were given no explanation for the refusal, and were denied shortly after their interview at the US embassy in the capital of Banjul in April. "It's more than 160 countries, so we'd have the chance to **mingle**".

"But we're not giving up, despite the challenges we face, we still continue to work hard", she said.

If team members are denied visas again, the Gambian American association will present the robot at the competition, Ceesay said.

FIRST Global's president, Joe Sestak, said in a post on the organisation's [Facebook](#) page that he was "saddened" by the USA decision but the Afghan team would be able to connect with the competition via a live Skype video link. "They asked us if we were building RoboCop", he said.

The U.S. embassies in Afghanistan and the Gambia and the State Department say they can not discuss visa requests.

Media commentator and researcher from the Cato Institute, Jonathan Blanks, tweeted: "I feel safer now that we've denied a once in a lifetime opportunity to a group of girls whose country we've been bombing since their birth". "All of the countries can participate in the competitions, but we can't".