



## **Hardest hit Nigeria acts swiftly to reverse U.S. permanent residency visa restriction**

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The United States' latest permanent residency visa restriction involving nationals of Nigeria, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan and Myanmar has received swift reaction from Africa's most populous nation.

Nigeria's Muhammadu Buhari per Friday's announcement appointed a minister to lead a committee to "study and address" the new visa requirements. While the new provision gets activated on February 21, official, business and tourism visas will not be affected, according to a statement from Mr. Buhari's office on Saturday.

Sudanese and Tanzanian nationals will no longer be allowed to apply for "diversity visas", which are available by lottery for applicants from countries with low rates of immigration to the US.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, however, clarified that non-immigrant visas given to people for temporary stays – including visitors, those doing business or people seeking medical treatment – would not be impacted by the new rules.

Nigeria is the hardest hit given in 2018, the US issued more than 8,000 immigration visas to its citizens while Sudan, Tanzania and Eritrea got 2000, 290 and 31 visas respectively.

"These countries, for the most part, want to be helpful but for a variety of different reasons simply failed to meet those minimum requirements that we laid out," Mr. Wolf noted.

"Nigeria remains committed to maintaining productive relations with the United States and its international allies, especially on matters of global security," presidential spokesman Femi Adesina said.

Mr. Wolf said officials would work with the countries on bolstering their security requirements to help remove them from the list.

But while the US officials point out to security concerns as reason for the new visa restrictions, critics hold that such barriers feed into president trump's aversion to Muslims.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Sudan have large Muslim majorities. Nigeria, Africa's populous nation has about half of its citizens being Muslim as it's the case in Eritrea. Tanzania which wouldn't have raised an eye brow also has a sizable Muslim community.

President Trump wasted no time in signing a travel ban in Jan. 2017 which restricted people from seven majority-Muslim countries from accessing the US, arguing it was in America's best interest. The swift ban caused chaos at airports and eventually landed at the Supreme Court.

Citizens from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Venezuela and North Korea have restricted access of varying degrees upheld by the Supreme Court in 2018. Chad was removed from the list last April after the White House said the country improved security measures.

With four out of the six countries in the latest ban being African, lawmakers and advocates are calling the changes discriminatory and without merit.

Unlike the original ban, the new restrictions only include categories of immigration visa applicants. Specifically, all immigrants from Burma, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria will be banned from the US. However, only green card lotteries will be restricted from Sudan and Tanzania, said a DHS official Friday.

"Travelers on their way to the United States will not be denied entry as a result of this proclamation," said the official. Nationals of the six countries already in the US or those with a valid visa to come to the US will "not be impacted," the official added.

"The ban should be ended, not expanded. President Trump is doubling down on his signature anti-Muslim policy — and using the ban as a way to put even more of his prejudices into practice by excluding more communities of color," ACLU's director of its Immigrants' Rights Project, Omar Jadwat, responded in a statement.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, and Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colorado, criticized the latest incarnation of the ban in anticipation of its expansion. "It's pure discrimination and racism," Jackson Lee said.

"I'm the son of immigrants. My parents are Eritrean Americans. They were born in Eritrea. They came to the United States as refugees nearly 40 years ago. Their ability to do that offered me and family tremendous freedoms and opportunities," Neguse said.

Director of Immigration Studies Alex Nowrasteh at the libertarian Cato Institute said there is no national security justification for banning immigrants from these countries.

"The annual chance of being murdered by a foreign-born terrorist from those six countries on US soil is about 1 in 1.9 billion per year," he said in a statement.