

REGION

EDITORS: ANNIE GARAU & CORA HENRY | REGION@IDSNEWS.COM



The Batman family fled war-torn Syria in 2012 and eventually settled in Indianapolis about a year ago. Marwan, the father, works in a Middle Eastern store and restaurant, earning \$8.30 an hour to provide for his wife and four children (wife and oldest daughter not pictured). Last month, after the attacks in Paris, Gov. Mike Pence suspended the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the state.

THE UNSETTLED

Forced to flee Syria and start over in Indiana, the Batman family adjusts to a state that suddenly doesn't want them anymore

Story by Alden Woods | aldwoods@indiana.edu | @ac_woods
Photos by Ike Hajnazarian | ihajnaz@indiana.edu | @_IkeHaji
Graphics by Anna Boone | anmboone@indiana.edu | @annamarieboone

INDIANAPOLIS — The kids felt it first. That day, when the governor declared refugees like them unwelcome, fear pulsed through their schools.

Rama, the 15-year-old, heard it in her classmates' voices when they blamed Muslims, saw it when they pointed at her headscarf. Rakan, her 13-year-old brother, was caught off guard when a group of boys approached him in the hallway.

"Are you from ISIS?" they asked him. He shook his head and shuffled away.

Like the rest of their family, the two teenagers knew about the terror in Paris the previous Friday — the bombings and gunfire that had left more than 100 people dead. They knew the ISIS had claimed responsibility for the attacks and that a fake Syrian passport had been found among the destruction.

The following Monday evening, when the Batman family heard that Gov. Mike Pence was blocking Syrian refugees from entering Indiana, their small apartment fell silent.

Ten seconds passed. Fifteen, then twenty. Marwan, the father, was the first to speak.

"Call?" he asked in his broken English, holding up a cell phone. "Call?"

Marwan didn't know the governor's name and didn't understand that getting him on the phone would be almost impossible. Over the rims of his glasses, he looked at his wife Lona, at Rama and Rakan, at his two youngest daughters chasing each other up and down the staircase.

If he could just talk to the governor, maybe Marwan could tell his

family's story. Maybe Marwan could help him understand.

* * *

The Batmans are among a handful of Syrian families who have fled civil war and settled in Indiana, joining about 2,000 Syrian refugees living across the United States. Since the terrorist attacks in Paris, they have been swept up in a national wave of paranoia and hatred.

In Chicago, two men were asked not to board a plane after they were overheard speaking Arabic. Human feces and pages ripped from a Quran were thrown at the door of a Texas mosque. A few hours' drive from that mosque, protesters outside an Islamic center carried picket signs and 12-gauge shotguns.

As outrage grew, an Indianapolis refugee volunteer told the city's small community of Syrians to stay in their homes. "People are angry," she warned them. "I don't know what's going to happen."

Citing concerns of terrorism, more than half the country's governors announced plans to oppose or block Syrian refugees from settling in their states. Pence was one of the first.

"Indiana has a long tradition of opening our arms and homes to refugees from around the world," Pence said in a statement. "But, as governor, my first responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of all Hoosiers."

When Pence made his announcement, a new family of Syrian refugees was scheduled to fly into Indianapolis the next day. They never made it. The couple and their small child

were rerouted to Connecticut, where the governor publicly welcomed them and bashed Pence's decision.

"This is the same guy who signed a homophobic bill in the spring, surrounded by homophobes," Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy said. "So I'm not surprised by anything the governor does."

As masses of Syrians huddled outside European borders and in cramped refugee camps, they became the central figures in a debate over the soul of America. Would a nation founded by refugees now turn them away?

Politicians labeled them terrorists-in-wait, saying the United States' intensive screening process couldn't catch everything.

"Highly concerning," Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker said.

"It is clear that the influx of Syrian refugees poses a threat," Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker said.

"I will do everything humanly possible to stop any plans ... to put Syrian refugees in Mississippi," Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said.

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump suggested the refugees could be a "Trojan horse" for terrorism and proposed barring all Muslims from entering the country. Fellow candidates Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz offered plans to accept only Christian refugees.

President Obama condemned the blockade, calling it "shameful" and "not American." He declared the U.S. would continue to accept refugees.

As America argued, the flood of people trying to escape Syria continued. Ten million Syrians have been forced out of their homes as casualties of an ever-escalating civil war. Of those, more than 4 million have fled the country and registered as refugees.

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This summer, President Obama pledged to take in at least 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next year. The U.S. has made little progress on that plan.

The United Nations has recommended more than 22,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement in the U.S. since 2013. After a screening process that can take as long as two years, about 2,000 have been accepted.

The Batmans were among the first Syrian refugees to settle in Indiana. Since their arrival in November 2014, they had been navigating a world they barely understood: learning English, starting school and paying bills while the country decides

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Marwan places patties of meat behind the glass display at the Middle Eastern store and restaurant where he works on Oct. 17.



Rakan, 13, studies in first-period math at Belzer Middle School in Lawrence, Indiana, on Nov. 2. Rakan is one of two Arabic-speaking students in the school.