

# Muslims rap decision on former pop singer: Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, denied entry to U.S.

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British and American Muslims say they remain bewildered by U.S. authorities' decision to refuse entry to the former singer Cat Stevens, a British citizen who became a Muslim in 1977 and is now known as Yusuf Islam.

Islam was flying from London's Heathrow Airport to Dulles International Airport in Washington on September 21 when the flight was diverted to Bangor, Maine, where he was taken off the aircraft. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was reported in the British media as telling Secretary of State Colin Powell that the action "should not have been taken."

The onetime performer was refused entry because he was recently put on a security watch list, ostensibly because authorities believe he has contributed funds to groups linked to terrorism, which he has denied.

Writing in the *Los Angeles Times* September 28, Islam said the most upsetting part of the ordeal was being separated at the airport from his 21-year-old daughter for 33 hours, not knowing where she was or when they would be reunited since his cell phone was confiscated.

"God Almighty! Is this the same planet I'd taken off from?" he wrote. Only two months earlier, he added, he had met with officials of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives "to talk about my charity work."

Blaming "the indiscriminate procedure of profiling" in screening travelers, Islam said the system "serves only to belittle America's image as a defender of the civil liberties that so many dearly struggled and died for over the centuries."

Islam said that "anyone who knows me" will attest to his opposition to any form of terrorism, including killing of innocent people and hostages. "I've openly and

publicly repudiated the actions of groups that resort to such acts of inhumanity," he wrote in the *Times*.

The American decision was termed "a slap in the face of sanity" by Abdul Bari, deputy secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain. "Yusuf Islam is a deeply respected and very popular British Muslim figure, and his detention by the U.S. authorities is completely unacceptable," he said.

In Washington, both the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Council on American-Islamic Relations issued statements expressing shock. MPAC senior adviser Maher Hathout said, "It definitely adds to the isolation of our country, and consolidates the negative image about our government."