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Creative director is granted U.S. visa

Ahmet Ahmet can return to L.A. after waiting six months for security clearance.

By Evelyn Iritani, Times Staff Writer
January 12, 2007

After spending six months trapped in legal limbo in London, creative director Ahmet Ahmet has been granted a visa by the U.S. government to return home to Los Angeles.

Ahmet said he returned to his rented apartment in London on Thursday and found a package from the U.S. Embassy containing the passports and visas that will allow his family to enter the United States.

Ahmet, a British citizen, and his family had gone to Britain last summer to visit his ailing mother. When they sought permission to return to the U.S., they were told Ahmet needed to undergo a security review for unspecified reasons. The same thing had happened in 2005, when Ahmet took his family to London for a two-week summer vacation. That time, it took more than four months to get their visas approved.

In both cases, the U.S. government refused to provide any explanation for the lengthy delays in processing. His experience was detailed in an article in The Times on Dec. 25.

Ahmet, a 48-year-old Cypriot of Turkish descent, said he was thrilled that he and his wife, Meral, and 12-year-old daughter, Mia, could return to their Pacific Palisades home.

Despite the ordeal's emotional and financial toll, Ahmet said he harbored no ill will toward America. He was granted a nonimmigrant work visa six years ago to join Imaginary Forces, a Hollywood creative agency.

"You can't judge a nation by one thing, and hopefully the good will outweigh the bad," Ahmet said by phone from London. "But it's not like a blind faith. People have to work for that."

After being forced to wait for a visa two years in a row, Ahmet said he feared leaving the country again. He was in the process of applying for permanent residency when he got stuck in London last summer.

Executives at Imaginary Forces had lobbied U.S. and British politicians on Ahmet's behalf. He had been a key employee at the small firm, overseeing the design of movie trailers and film titles for blockbusters such as "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" and Sam Raimi's "Spider-Man."

The U.S. government has declined to comment on Ahmet's case. Fewer than 3% of the nearly 8 million people who apply for U.S. visas each year are subjected to extra security reviews, according to the government.

Last year, the Bush administration announced it would establish a "one-stop redress" program in the Department of Homeland Security where travelers could go to resolve immigration problems. The program has not yet been launched.

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