

# UNO professor forced to flee Bosnian war tells midtown vigil: 'Being a refugee is not a choice'

[http://www.omaha.com/news/metro/uno-professor-forced-to-flee-bosnian-war-tells-midtown-vigil/article\\_8433ae6a-5c9a-510e-9cc3-690d9397f6cb.html](http://www.omaha.com/news/metro/uno-professor-forced-to-flee-bosnian-war-tells-midtown-vigil/article_8433ae6a-5c9a-510e-9cc3-690d9397f6cb.html)



Lana Obradovic is an expert on American foreign and national security. She's the author of an award-winning book. She's an assistant professor of political science at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. And, more than 20 years ago, she was a refugee.

Obradovic, who moved to Lincoln from Bosnia as a war refugee in the early 1990s, joined religious leaders and current refugees in speaking to a crowd of more than 1,000 people at Turner Park Tuesday evening.

The interfaith candlelight vigil was held to show support for refugees in Omaha and abroad.

"Being a refugee is not a choice, and that is hard to explain," Obradovic told the group, many of whom held candles and signs. "You are there because you are out of choices."

Refugees differ from immigrants. Refugees go on waiting lists and are vetted to determine whether they meet certain criteria to enter a country, including fleeing dire conditions such as war or persecution.

More than 30 religious leaders of different faiths participated in the event, which is the latest local response to an executive order halting refugee settlement in the United States. **Lutheran Family Services along with the Tri-Faith Initiative, the Refugee Empowerment Center, Omaha Together One Community, the ACLU of Nebraska, the Anti-Defamation League and Nebraska Appleseed organized the vigil.**

Illuminated by hundreds of candles and the lights of Midtown Crossing, people held signs that said "refugees welcome," "hate has no home here" and "I love my Muslim neighbors."

Newly arrived Syrian refugees, as well as refugees from Myanmar, the Congo, Iraq and Afghanistan were in attendance. When they were mentioned, the crowd applauded, some people yelling, "welcome!"

Since 2002, 1,261 Iraqis, 1,081 Sudanese and 734 Somalis have started new lives in Nebraska. In the past year, 163 Syrians have also moved to the state.

Dekow Sagar, coordinator of the Lutheran Family Services International Center of the Heartland and a former Somalian refugee, said many Muslim refugees in Omaha didn't attend the vigil because they feared for their safety. No one in America should have to live in fear because of their religion or nationality, he said.

"We are one from north to south and from east to west," he said. The crowd cheered.

Kathy Higbee, who teaches immigrant and refugee students at the Omaha Public Schools' Teen Literacy Center, attended to support her students. "It's inspiring to have everybody come together," she said.

As the temperature dipped, the group ended the event by singing "This Land is Your Land."

"We need to be a light for freedom and for democracy," Higbee said.

*hailey.konnath@owh.com, 402-444-1216*

<http://www.kmtv.com/news/local-news/omaha-groups-host-vigil-to-support-local-refugees>