My name is Gillian Lester and I am the Dean of Columbia Law School.

Today, I would like to share with you some of the effects of President Trump’s executive order on Columbia, its Law School, and other universities across the country.

Many American law schools and universities—Columbia, in particular—have longstanding and deep international roots. One million international students come to the United States each year to study, drawn to the unique opportunities, and leading faculty, labs, and research centers. They contribute more than $30 billion per annum to the US economy. And research collaborations between scholars in the United States and other countries have been essential to important developments in all fields of study, from medicine, public health and engineering, to international economic law, human rights, and international relations.

Throughout our long history, the presence, voice, and vibrant engagement of students and scholars from all parts of the world—from all religions, cultures, and ethnicities, and from within and without our national borders—have been essential.

The executive order is causing uncertainty and anxiety among students and scholars, and has threatened universities’ ability to carry out the international research that is critical to our mission. In the immediate aftermath, it has stranded university students and scholars, separated them from their families, and interrupted their studies. But it is having longer term effects as well. Students from banned countries who had hoped to study here next year are now uncertain and afraid that their educational dreams will be not be realized. We have heard that even some Muslim, Arab, and South Asian students and scholars who are not from one of the seven banned countries plan to forego visits to family abroad and fear carrying out research in now-banned countries. What is more, they worry about an increase in hate crimes, stigmatization, and
discrimination here in the United States.

Leaders of universities in the United States have widely condemned the executive order. The presidents of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Association of American Universities, and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities have all emphasized the order’s negative effects on education and research.

At Columbia Law School school alone, we welcome hundreds of students every year from countries all around the world, as well as many visiting scholars and professors who teach, produce new scholarship, and provide invaluable contributions to academic and public discourse.

Just as significantly, our American students’ education is also enriched by learning alongside international students and by attending lectures given by visiting researchers and experts, many from the countries subject to the executive order. International educational exchange also promotes positive cooperation between governments, thereby advancing international peace and security.

I believe that the purpose of the executive order, and the sweep of its scope, are anathema to our values holding that no member of our community should be subjected to fear, insecurity, or hostility due to discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin. Such action is deeply harmful to universities and students, as well as to civil society, and the executive order should be rescinded.

Thank you.