

Transgender being refused entry into Dubai Being showcased like an attraction

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Baffled, sad and most of all upset. Those were the feelings which came up when Jan Janice reported at Customs at the airport of Dubai - one of the seven Arab Emirates - together with other passengers. What should have been a pleasant visit to friends ended up in a drama. "As a transgender, I have never ever been so humiliated onto the bone".

Without the faintest idea, Jen Janice got off the plane on that hot December day and went through Customs. A few days ago she had decided to continue to the United Arab Emirates to visit some friends, after a business meeting in Kuwait. She was very much looking forward to it, as it had been a while since she seen her friends. But in her wildest dreams she would not have guessed the end result. "I was queuing up at customs and I was dressed modestly. When it was finally my turn, the customs official studied my passport. He then called for help from a passing-by colleague". Jen Janice was stunned. Because she is unable to speak Arabic, she could not make out any of the conversation following that. His stern facial expression then changed when he



heard a remark from a colleague. "I was clearly the subject. A few times, he looked at me in minute detail and then back into my passport. That was so humiliating." Because she has not had her Sexual Corrective Surgery (SRS), Jan Janice is still registered as a male.

And then the long wait started. Jen Janice was taken out of the queue and into a separate room. "Another man joined them and together they started asking all sorts of questions. What I wanted to do in their country and why I looked the way I do? One of the officials just could not understand why I am a man but look like a woman". The men did not know what to do with her. Next, like a criminal she was taken to yet another room where she had to wait for hours again. When I asked if I could call one of my friends, they reacted rigidly that that was absolutely not possible. They also asked me why I wanted to be a woman. They were very intimidating. On top of that, it was very humiliating that more and more customs

officials came into the room just to have a look at me. They all started laughing/giggling. Although it had not been mentioned yet, at that time it daunted upon me that I would be deported." She still is livid having been put up as a curiosity. "My passport reads that I am a male. But from when I was nineteen, I already felt like a women. This has never been a problem work-wise. My management and direct colleagues respect me for who I am."

In the airport the doors were opened up and Jen Janice was taken to another room by some airport ground-handling staff. In the departure hall we caught the attention of quite some people. In the room where she subsequently had to take place were another fifty or-so people from different countries who just like Jen Janice, would be deported. "I then lost courage. I was told officially that I would have to leave the country immediately. I felt dismayed and could have easily cried. My dignity was at stake. No reason was given as to why I had to leave. I was extremely sad that this had to happen to me. I had only wanted to visit my friends and meant no harm. Via Blackberry, I then finally managed to contact my manager. She was on the road and reacted upset when she heard my story. My employer then offered help and arranged for my return trip. Not easy, because many flights had been cancelled due to the heavy snowfall at Schiphol airport. I was really lucky being able to leave so quickly. Else, I might have had to stay for two days in that room amongst all those other deportees.

Back in the Netherlands, she is determined not to drop the story. Although the planned visit to her friends was purely for pleasure, her employer is supporting her wholeheartedly. "Early January, I have sent a letter to the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Singapore as I still hold a Singapore passport. But up until now I have not received a reply. The Singapore embassy in the United Arab Emirates is looking into the matter. "In future, without a doubt, I will need to travel for business to the UAE more often. So then it should be clear as to what I can expect. We've got a big leap ahead of us before transgender ladies can be themselves. All my life, I've been fighting to prove that I'm just like everyone else. The fact that I have to continue to proof myself is inhumane."

In spite our repeated attempts, the GayKrant Newspaper was not able to obtain a comment from the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates.