

# SXSW 2017: Fest reps say international artist visa problems did not increase significantly this year

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Despite several high profile incidents in which international artists headed to the South by Southwest Music Festival [reported being detained, handcuffed and deported](#), a festival spokesperson said Saturday that the number of international artists denied entry to the country “was not significantly higher than in years past that we are aware of.”

International music has always had a huge presence at South by Southwest and this year, fest reps told the Statesman that 572 of the 2011 bands booked onto the festival were coming from outside the country.

In the week before the festival kicked off, Matthew Covey, an immigration lawyer who runs Tamizdat, a nonprofit that helps international artists navigate U.S. visa law, said the kind of border interrogations we’ve been hearing about recently are not new. “People being forced to open their cell phones, open their computers, well that happens all the time,” he said. “That’s been going on as long as people have had smart phones. The fact that it’s getting attention now is great, because it was never very cool and they shouldn’t be doing it except under extreme situations.”

Covey was an organizer of the Contrabanned/MusicUnites showcase at the Palm Door on Friday night, that featured artists representing countries targeted by President Trump’s travel ban. Hip-hop/reggae artist Emmanuel Jal, a former child soldier from Sudan who currently lives in Canada, put in a very moving set at the show. Part of his mission as an artist, he said, is to combat the irrational fear that separates humans from each other.

“The greatest fight is with yourself to fight your fear... to fight with love” Jal said.

“Fear is real in the mind,” he said. “Think about peace and kindness in your mind we can bring that here.”