



February 4, 2011

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The Honorable Peter T. King
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman King:

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations that works to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, is writing to express our deep concern about the upcoming hearings you have scheduled in the Committee on Homeland Security on the “radicalization of the American Muslim community and homegrown terrorists.”¹ We respectfully urge you to postpone, reframe or cancel these hearings. Instead of hearings, we urge you to meet with a representative group of civil rights leaders, including Muslim Americans and selected law enforcement officials, to discuss constructive ways to address your concerns.

We do not make this request lightly; nor do we presume to determine the agenda of the House Committee on Homeland Security. However, your hearings, as currently proposed, do a disservice to the seriousness of the topic of “domestic terrorism” and are likely to contribute to a public backlash against Muslim Americans.

We strongly believe that as currently framed, these hearings will inevitably stoke anti-Muslim sentiment and increase suspicion and fear of the American Muslim community. During the previous year in particular, we witnessed a drastic increase in anti-Muslim public discourse and sentiment. Some of the more public examples include: the backlash against the Park51 Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan; the hostilities against the Islamic center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee; and the widespread, sensationalistic coverage of plans by a small, nondenominational church in Gainesville, Florida to host an “International Burn a Quran Day” last fall. Hate crime activity against Muslim Americans also remains high.²

¹ Peter King, “What’s Radicalizing Muslim Americans?” *Newsday*, Dec. 17, 2010 at <http://www.newsday.com/opinion/oped/king-what-s-radicalizing-muslim-americans-1.2550488>.

² “Confronting the New Faces of Hate: Hate Crimes in America,” The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2009, at 30–31, at http://www.civilrights.org/publications/hatecrimes/lccref_hate_crimes_report.pdf



We are also deeply troubled by much of the rhetoric surrounding these hearings. In at least two instances, you appear to have made broad and unsubstantiated assertions against the American Muslim community, including perpetuating the dangerous myth that 85 percent of mosques in America are run by extremists,³ whereas experts have concluded that mosque attendance is a significant factor in the prevention of extremism.⁴

Furthermore, during a recent interview, you went so far as to imply that American Muslims are not American.⁵ This suggestion that American Muslims are somehow less American—simply by virtue of their faith—is an affront to our constitutional values and to all Americans.

The examples of misinformation about American Muslims are especially troubling in light of the significant contributions that Muslim Americans make to our communities and our country. Muslims serve our nation as members of Congress, the armed forces, business leaders, factory workers, teachers, doctors, cab drivers, and lawyers. As FBI Director Robert Mueller stated, “99.9 percent of Muslim-Americans, Arab Americans, Sikh-Americans are every bit as patriotic and supportive of the United States as any others of us here in the United States, and that has come out since September 11th.”⁶ Instead of advancing our national security, the current scope of the hearings will likely weaken counterterrorism efforts by ignoring the long history of Muslim cooperation with law enforcement – potentially discouraging such cooperation in the future. Singling out a group of Americans based on their faith is not only unjust, but it also will likely lead to further misunderstandings.

In addressing violent extremism, any congressional inquiry should be broad in scope to include all forms of domestic terror threats, and it should include violence motivated by all extremist beliefs. We should strive to identify terrorists by their behavior rather than by their religion, race, or ethnicity.

It is essential that we all work together to guarantee the security of our country. As such, we respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss the possibility of either broadening the scope of the upcoming committee hearings or canceling them altogether.

³ See Sean Hannity interview with Peter King, 2004, cited at <http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=23257>. “I would say, you could say that 80-85 percent of mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists.” When pressed by Mr. Hannity, King continued, “I’ll stand by that number of 85 percent. This is an enemy living amongst us.”

⁴ See David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, Ebrahim Moosa, *Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans*, Duke Univ., Jan. 6, 2010, at 28–29.

⁵ See *Frank Gaffney Interview with Peter King, Secure Freedom Radio With Frank Gaffney*, Jan. 6, 2011, available at <http://www.securefreedomradio.org/2011/01/06/january-6-2011-faith-mcdonnell-rep-pete-king-sara-carter>.

“When a war begins, we’re all Americans. But in this case, this is not the situation. And whether it’s pressure, whether it’s cultural tradition, whatever, the fact is the Muslim community does not cooperate anywhere near to the extent that it should. The irony is that we’re living in two different worlds.”

⁶ FBI Director Praises American Muslim Cooperation, Foreign Press Center Briefing, Feb. 17, 2004, at http://www.amuslimvoice.org/html/body_fbi_director.html.

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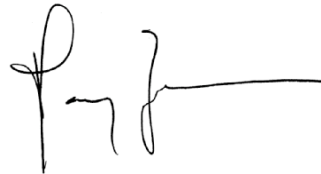


If you have any questions about this letter, or the position taken by The Leadership Conference, please contact Lexer Quamie at 202.466.3648 or quamie@civilrights.org, or Nancy Zirkin at 202.263.2880 or zirkin@civilrights.org. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO
The Leadership Conference



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President
The Leadership Conference



Karen Narasaki
President and Executive Director of the Asian American Justice Center
Vice Chair, The Leadership Conference

CC: The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security