

February 1, 2011

The Honorable John Boehner
Office of the Speaker
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
235 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi:

The undersigned community organizations and groups concerned about civil and human rights and national security strongly object to the hearings on violent extremism recently announced by the Chair of the Committee on Homeland Security, Congressman Peter King. Chairman King has characterized the hearings, tentatively scheduled for February 2011, as focusing exclusively on the “radicalization of the American Muslim community and homegrown terrorism.”¹ If Chairman King proceeds with these hearings, please urge him to address all forms of violence motivated by extremist beliefs and to do so in a full, fair, and objective way.

Today, American Muslims reflect every race and ethnicity that comprise our nation’s rich heritage. In fact, Muslims have been an integral part of America since its founding when the first slave ships arrived on its shores. Muslims serve our nation as teachers, business owners, factory workers, cab drivers, doctors, lawyers, law enforcement, firefighters, members of Congress, and members of the armed forces. Their research and innovation adds to the progress of our nation in science, business, medicine, and technology. They contribute to every aspect of our nation’s economy and society. The essence of our country is *e pluribus unum*: out of many, practicing their faith freely and contributing each in their own way, comes a strong, unified one.

The hearings planned by Chairman King, however, are inconsistent with this vision of America. Singling out a group of Americans for government scrutiny based on their faith is divisive and wrong. These hearings will inevitably examine activities protected by the First Amendment, an affront to fundamental freedoms upon which our country was founded. It harkens back to hearings held in the 1950s by then-U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy. That dark chapter in our history taught us that Congress has a solemn duty to wield its investigatory power responsibly.

¹ Peter King, *What’s Radicalizing Muslim Americans?*, Newsday, December 17, 2010.

In the course of justifying the focus of the hearings, Chairman King has made broad and unsubstantiated assertions about the American Muslim community. For example, he continues to perpetuate the myth that 80% of mosques in America are run by extremists,² implying that they are hotbeds of extremism. To the contrary, experts have concluded that mosque attendance is a significant factor in the prevention of extremism.³ In addition, during a recent interview, Chairman King made a statement insinuating that American Muslims are not American:

“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.”⁴

If Chairman King is suggesting that American Muslims are somehow less American – simply by virtue of their faith – then that is an affront to all Americans.

Providing a public, government platform for these erroneous and offensive views has consequences. The American public takes cues from government officials. These hearings will almost certainly increase widespread suspicion and mistrust of the American Muslim community and stoke anti-Muslim sentiment. During 2010, we saw an increase in anti-Muslim hatred in public discourse, as well as hate crimes and violence targeting American Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, including vandalism and arson of mosques, physical attacks, bullying of children in schools, and attempted murder. No American should live in fear for his or her safety, and Congress should not help create a climate where it is acceptable to target a particular faith community for discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Furthermore, a hearing that demonizes the American Muslim community will not go unnoticed by Muslims around the world and will contribute to perceptions of how the U.S. government treats Muslims. Equal treatment and respect for all faiths are among our nation’s greatest strengths and are essential to a free and just society.

Our nation faces serious threats, both foreign and domestic. Violence motivated by extremist beliefs is not committed by members of one racial, religious, or political group. The Committee on Homeland Security should focus on keeping us safe, rather than engaging in fear-mongering and divisive rhetoric that only weakens the fabric of our nation and distracts us from actual threats.

² *The Laura Ingraham Show*, January 24, 2011.

³ See David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, Ebrahim Moosa, *Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim Americans*, Duke University, January 6, 2010, at 28-29.

⁴ *Secure Freedom Radio With Frank Gaffney*, January 6, 2011.

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We strongly urge you to object to the hearings in their current form. If Chairman King wishes to address violent extremism, then we hope you will ensure that he examines violence motivated by extremist beliefs, *in all its forms*, in a full, fair and objective way. The hearings should proceed from a clear understanding that individuals are responsible for their actions, not entire communities.

Thank you for your attention to the issues raised in this letter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Pakistan Foundation
Amnesty International USA
Arab American Institute
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Constitutional Rights
Council on American-Islamic Relations
EMERGE-USA
Human Rights First
Indian Muslim Relief & Charities
Interfaith Alliance
Islamic Medical Association of North America
Islamic Networks Group
Islamic Society of North America
Japanese American Citizens League
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Network for Arab American Communities
Open Society Institute
Pakistani American Public Affairs Committee
Sikh Coalition
South Asian Americans Leading Together
Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Association of American Muslim Lawyers
American Muslim Law Enforcement Officers Association
Arab American Association of New York
Asian Law Caucus
Bay Area Association of Muslim Lawyers
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
DRUM - Desis Rising Up and Moving
Florida Muslim Bar Association
The Freedom and Justice Foundation
Georgia Association of Muslim Lawyers
Houston Shifa Services Foundation
Inner-City Muslim Action Network
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Majlis Ash-Shura of Metropolitan New York
Michigan Muslim Bar Association
Muslim Alliance of Indiana
Muslim Bar Association of Chicago
Muslim Bar Association of New York
Muslim Bar Association of Southern California
Muslim Consultative Network
Network of Arab American Professionals - NY
New England Muslim Bar Association
New Jersey Muslim Bar Association
Northern California Islamic Council
Ohio Muslim Bar Association
Somali Community Services - San Jose, CA

cc: The Honorable Peter King
The Honorable Bennie Thompson