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Groups Say Screening Invites Bias

By [MELANIE TROTTMAN](#)

Twenty-seven organizations on Friday asked the Department of Homeland Security to change newly tightened airport-security rules that they say will result in racial and ethnic profiling.

In a letter to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, the groups -- about half representing Muslim Americans -- criticized a new policy that requires extra screening for people traveling to the U.S. from or through 14 countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism or countries "of interest."

The terror-sponsor list includes Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria, while the countries of interest include Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Yemen.

The groups said in the letter that with the exception of Cuba, the directive targets individuals traveling from Muslim-majority or Middle Eastern countries with no regard as to whether the passenger poses an individualized threat.

The groups also said the extra screening diverts attention and resources from legitimate leads and suspicious behavior.

"All of us are concerned about the security of our nation. However, security policies based on ethnic and religious profiling are both ineffective and contrary to constitutional principles. Terrorism is neither ethnically nor geographically confined," the letter reads.

DHS spokesman Matt Chandler said the agency would respond directly to the letter's authors. He said the Transportation Security Administration, an arm of the DHS, "does not profile."

The new DHS policy is one of several actions the Obama administration took following a failed attempt by a Nigerian national to blow up a Northwest Airlines passenger jet flying to Detroit on Christmas Day. The suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, is accused of hiding explosives in his underwear. He pleaded not guilty to the charges Friday.

"As is always the case, TSA security measures are based on threat, not ethnic or religious background," said Mr. Chandler. He also noted that the new directives applied to every person flying to the U.S. from or through the list of 14 countries, and required that a majority of travelers flying to the U.S. from everywhere else in the world go through enhanced, threat-based and random screening.

Among the groups are the Muslim Advocates, the Arab American Institute, the Muslim Bar Associations in several states and the Pakistani American Public Affairs Committee.

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