



**INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE**
PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOTE TO PRODUCERS/REPORTERS: *Attendees will be available after the meeting for interview at approx. 5:15 p.m. at 10th St. NW and Pennsylvania Ave., in front of the Dept. of Justice Building.*

Attorney General Meets Today with U.S. Faith Leaders to Address Rising Anti-Muslim Bigotry & Hate Crimes

After nationwide surge in attacks on Muslims, U.S. leaders seek federal action in advance of Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr, 9/11 anniversary, Qur'an burning

(WASHINGTON, DC)—A broad coalition of national faith leaders and advocacy groups from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian communities—led by [Muslim Advocates](#), the [Interfaith Alliance](#), the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), and the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)—meets this afternoon with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to discuss steps the Department of Justice and the Attorney General can take against rising anti-Muslim hate and acts of violence and intimidation against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

Today's meeting is the result of a meeting on August 30 with Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Tom Perez, Muslim Advocates, the Interfaith Alliance, the Baptist Joint Committee and the Religious Action Center. Following that meeting, the Department invited these four groups to return to meet with the Attorney General directly. They will be joined by an expanded group of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith leaders and Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian community organizations.

The need for a strong statement from the Attorney General that the Department of Justice will protect religious freedom and prosecute those who commit religiously-motivated hate crimes has

never been greater. In the past several weeks, inflamed rhetoric from hate groups has provoked violent crimes, protests and intimidation toward American Muslims and mosques in Tennessee, California, New York, Florida, Wisconsin and elsewhere. As we approach the anniversary of 9/11 these hate crimes are terrifying many American Muslims, Arabs, South Asians and Sikhs and restricting their freedom to worship freely. Mosques in some areas have canceled public celebrations marking the end of Ramadan out of concern for congregants' safety.

“This week Muslims and Jews will be celebrating the holidays of Eid-al-Fitr and Rosh Hashanah, respectively, in their houses of worship,” said Farhana Khera, Executive Director, Muslim Advocates. “Today’s meeting with the Attorney General sends the strong message to faith communities across America that no one should have to pray in fear and that the federal government will not tolerate hate-motivated violence and intimidation. An attack on one faith community is an attack on us all.”

In last week’s meeting and again today, the coalition of organizations requests that the Attorney General take the following actions to protect and preserve religious freedom and the safety and security of all Americans and their houses of worship:

- **Make a Public Statement:** Attorney General Eric Holder should make a strong public statement underscoring the federal government’s commitment to religious freedom, condemning hate crimes and other forms of harassment and discrimination targeting the Muslim and other faith communities, and stating that the Department of Justice will hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Lead a Coordinated Federal Response:** The DOJ Civil Rights Division office should lead other federal agencies, including Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the Department of Education (DOE), in creating a coordinated federal response to the backlash. The Division should direct its Community Relations Service (CRS) offices to act to defuse tensions where incidents have already occurred and in areas where incitement activities are expected to take place, such as Gainesville, Fla., where a church is planning to burn copies of the

Qur'an (and perhaps even the Talmud) on Saturday, September 11.

- **Utilize recently-passed federal Hate Crimes Law:** The federal government should provide funding and technical assistance to state and local jurisdictions to help them to more effectively investigate and prosecute hate crimes, consistent with The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, signed into law by President Barack Obama in October of last year.
- **Create a Civil Rights Division Hotline for Reporting Hate Crimes:** The current system of filing a complaint with the Division is confusing because it instructs members of the public to file complaints with individual sections. The Division should create one centralized hotline for the receipt, referral and tracking of all civil rights complaints.

Following the 4:45-5:15 p.m. meeting at the Department of Justice Building, leaders from these attending organizations will be available for interview:

Farhana Khera, Muslim Advocates

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, Interfaith Alliance

J. Brent Walker, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

Rabbi David Saperstein, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism