

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Faith Groups Anticipate Federal Action to Protect American Muslims & Religious Freedom in Wake of Hate Crimes

(WASHINGTON, DC)—In the midst of a national increase in violence and intimidation toward American Muslims, a coalition of faith groups and advocacy organizations met late yesterday afternoon with U.S. Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez and senior advisors to the Attorney General and Deputy General to ask that specific measures be taken as soon as possible to protect millions of American Muslims and the right to religious freedom of all Americans.

Representatives who met with Perez—including J. Brent Walker of the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy of the [Interfaith Alliance](#), Rabbi David Saperstein of the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#) and Farhana Khera of [Muslim Advocates](#)—expressed optimism that the administration is taking seriously the growing mood of hostility, by some, towards American Muslims.

Farhana Khera, Executive Director, Muslim Advocates:

“Muslims have been a part of America since the first slave ships landed on its shores. Yet, today there is an alarming trend of anti-Muslim hate and violence that is creating deep fear and anxiety throughout the Muslim community. These hate activities threaten public safety, as well as undermine the very fabric of our democracy. Muslim Advocates is hopeful that the Attorney General will send a strong message to those who would use violence and intimidation against Muslims, or any other group, that they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.”

Rabbi David Saperstein, RAC:

"We appreciate the broad range of actions taken by the federal government in combating bias against Muslims. The growing spate of hate crimes, attacks on Muslim groups and mosques, and anti-Muslim rhetoric calls for even more vigorous and effective responses from both the government and our nation's religious communities. Securing the right of religious freedom and ensuring that we, and our neighbors, are able to follow the dictates of our conscience, free of fear, is an issue of urgent importance in America. Both the government and religious leaders must act to defeat religious discrimination and intimidation and to combat this recent wave of Islamophobic activity by enforcing laws when they are violated and promoting civility, tolerance and mutual respect between our religious communities."

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, President, The Interfaith Alliance:

"Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez's willingness to meet with us today was a gesture of openness and helpfulness and serves as a model for the appropriate partnership between religion and government. It is a model in which religious leaders encourage the Department of Justice to be highly visible and unceasingly bold in protecting the guarantees of the Constitution for minorities as well as for the majority, and government leaders affirming religious leaders call for civility and mutual respect for all citizens in a context of tension. This is a time for good religion and good government to call on all Americans to act on behalf of the common good."

J. Brent Walker, Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty:

"We stand in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters against attempts by some to thwart their constitutionally protected freedom of religion. History and experience have taught us that when anyone's religious liberty is denied, everyone's is in jeopardy."

The coalition of organizations has suggested that officials at the DOJ and the Attorney General's office take the following actions to protect and preserve religious freedoms and the rights of all American, including Muslims:

- **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 Quran on 9/11/10 (and perhaps even the Talmud).
- **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 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.