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New Transportation Security Administration Procedures Short-Sighted, Ineffective

New measures blatantly target individuals on the basis of ethnicity and religion

(SAN FRANCISCO) January 5, 2010—In response to the Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) issuance yesterday of a new security directive for those traveling to the United States from certain, primarily Muslim countries, national legal advocacy organization [Muslim Advocates](http://www.muslimadvocates.org) expresses concern that these new procedures fail to focus on suspicious behavior and credible intelligence and instead blatantly target travelers on the basis of their race, ethnicity and religion.

The new directive mandates that all passengers—including U.S. Citizens—flying into the U.S. from one of 14 countries, those designated as state sponsors of terrorism or identified as countries of interest, be subject to enhanced security measures, regardless of whether the passenger poses any individualized threat.

“The TSA’s policy is short-sighted and ineffective as it targets all travelers to the U.S. from certain countries, without focusing on *suspicious* behavior,” said Muslim Advocates Executive Director Farhana Khera. “A dragnet policy that targets all American and foreign nationals traveling from 14 countries provides false comfort because it diverts our attention and resources away from following legitimate leads and identifying suspicious behavior, regardless of a traveler’s itinerary or nationality. Neither the 9/11 hijackers, who commandeered domestic flights, nor the shoe bomber Richard Reid, a British citizen on a flight originating from London, would have been apprehended under these new measures.”

Security experts recognize that racial profiling is overly simplistic and illusory and that effective air security means training TSA and airport personnel to identify specific behaviors and warning signs, from curbside check-in to the ticket counter to the plane. The recent case of a Nigerian national traveling to Detroit illustrates that connecting facts to an individual’s behavior could prove more effective, including: the father alerting authorities about his son’s embrace of violent, extremist ideologies; intelligence indicating preparations for a terror plot involving a Nigerian named “Umar Farouk”; properly relaying this tip and intelligence to administrators of the nation’s no-fly and selectee lists (resulting either in him not being allowed to board the plane or being subject to enhanced security); and carrying inappropriate clothing for his destination.

Muslim Advocates (www.muslimadvocates.org) is a national legal advocacy and educational organization dedicated to promoting freedom, justice and equality for all, regardless of faith, by providing leadership through legal advocacy, policy engagement, and civic education, and by serving as a legal resource to promote the full and meaningful participation of Muslims in American public life.