

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Thursday, August 26, 2010**

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## **Rights Groups Call for Protection of Muslims Amid Growing Social Tensions**

In light of yesterday's stabbing of a New York City cabdriver currently being investigated as an anti-Muslim hate crime, [Human Rights First](http://HumanRightsFirst.org) and [Muslim Advocates](http://MuslimAdvocates.org) made the following statement:

The fundamental right to practice the religion of one's choosing is a bedrock principle of American democracy. A knife attack on an unarmed city cab driver is a criminal assault. That same violence, motivated by religious bias, is a hate crime that victimizes not only the wounded man and his family, but also harms the members of his community who must confront the fear of violence and, ultimately, all Americans who believe in our country's values of equality and religious freedom.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has invited the victim, Ahmed H. Sharif, to City Hall. His condemnation of the attack and his strong affirmation "that ethnic or religious bias has no place in our city" is a laudable example of principled leadership.

Whatever led the perpetrator to his burst of violence, Mr. Sharif, has stated that he feels "hopeless and insecure" and worried about further violence because of the public sentiment around the Park51 mosque. Just as no one should be physically attacked for his religious beliefs, no one should have to live and work in fear.

In addition to bringing Mr. Sharif to City Hall, the city and federal authorities should reach out to the greater Muslim community in New York and the region to address their needs for protection. Amid a heated national debate over the Park51 center that has included vitriolic statements about Islam and Muslims in America and protests against American Muslim community institutions in several states, federal authorities should work with local communities and law enforcement across the country to assess the potential for bias-motivated violence. Other public figures and private citizens should follow Mayor Bloomberg's lead and speak out in favor of tolerance and respect for people of all faiths.