

September 20, 2012

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The undersigned civil rights, faith, community and advocacy groups write to urge you to hold a presidential summit on religious tolerance to address the growing number of violent attacks on minority religious communities and houses of worship. A presidential summit would bring together stakeholders from across the country in a high-level dialogue to identify concrete solutions to prevent hate crimes and end religious bigotry. Religious bigotry has now reached a crisis point in our nation, and we believe your leadership is absolutely crucial to stem this rising tide of hate and violence.

While our organizations represent individuals from diverse racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds, we have come together to speak out against hate-fueled violence and bigotry directed at minority religious communities. As you know, on August 5, 2012, a white supremacist violated the sacred space of a house of worship and opened fire inside a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six individuals, leaving three others critically injured, and many others wounded. This attack – the deadliest hate-motivated violence in our nation in decades – was the first of several attacks on houses of worship throughout the country over the days that followed. On August 6, a mosque in Joplin, Missouri burned to the ground in a suspected arson attack; on August 10, shots from a pellet rifle were fired at the wall of the Muslim Education Center in Morton Grove, Illinois, while nearly 500 people were praying inside; and, on August 12 a bottle filled with acid was thrown at an Islamic school in Lombard, Illinois during evening prayers. These recent attacks were not isolated incidents, but rather a demonstration of the steady rise in anti-Muslim hatred among Americans. In addition, the Jewish community continues to experience hate crimes at an alarming rate. Incidents like these have instilled fear among many American Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, and other religious minorities, and it is imperative that the federal government address this nationwide problem.

A presidential summit on religious tolerance will engage interested parties such as community members, religious leaders, and local and federal government officials in conversations about reducing hate crimes directed at minority religious communities and eliminating religious bigotry. Furthermore, the summit could develop “best practices” or “guidelines” for communities across the country to manage religious divisions and call upon government officials to encourage the implementation of such guidelines.

There is ample precedent for the type of action we are asking you to take. In 1997, President Bill Clinton called upon Americans to join him in a year-long national initiative to address racial differences entitled, “One America in the 21st Century: The

President's Initiative on Race." As part of the initiative, President Clinton appointed an advisory board to assist him in engaging Americans across the country with constructive dialogue about the issues of race. President Clinton and his race advisory panel held multiple town hall meetings that brought together local community members representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, and professions. After months of consultation with experts and speaking directly to community members at the local level, the advisory panel published a report of its findings and recommendations to the President that focused on the need to strengthen educational efforts that would keep the public informed about race in America. A manual entitled "One America Dialogue Guide" was also created for local community groups to use when engaging others in dialogue concerning race relations.

Furthermore, President Clinton hosted a White House Conference on Hate Crimes on November 10, 1997. Participants of the day-long conference held at the George Washington University included President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Education, members of the Cabinet, members of Congress, selected state and local officials, and approximately 350 leaders from the law enforcement, civil rights, anti-violence, youth, education, and religious communities, as well as hate crimes survivors, and thousands of other participants from satellite-linked events all over the United States. At the conference, President Clinton announced law enforcement and prevention initiatives such as the establishment or expansion of working groups to develop enforcement strategies, share best practices, and educate the public about hate crimes by every U.S. Attorney, as well as the assignment of fifty more FBI agents and prosecutors to work on hate crimes enforcement.

We believe a presidential summit addressing religious tolerance, like President Clinton's race and hate crimes initiatives, will open the door for constructive conversations throughout the country and a plan of action to address these issues. In light of the many recent attacks on houses of worship, and the increasing intolerance of minority religious groups throughout the country, it is critically important for the federal government to promote religious tolerance and condemn hate crimes.

Mr. President, your leadership and high-level attention has never been more urgently needed to bring comfort to those who have been victims of this hate and to set a course forward for our country where children will not be judged by how they pray but by the content of their character.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

ACCESS
Access California Services
African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC)
Alliance for Justice

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
American Coalition For Good Government
American Hindu World Service (AHWS)
American Muslim Voice
American Muslim Health Professionals
American Pakistan Foundation
Anti-Defamation League
API Chaya, Seattle, WA
APICHA Community Health Center
APPNE (Association of Pakistani Physicians of New England)
Arab American Association of New York
Arab American Family Services - Bridgeview, IL
Arab American Family Support Center
Arab American Institute
Arab Muslim American Federation
Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Law Caucus
Common Cause
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC)
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Emerge USA
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Dēmos
Florida Islamic Association
Florida Muslim Bar Association
Franciscan Action Network
Freemuslim.org
Four Freedoms Forum
Georgia Association of Muslim Lawyers (GAML)
Groundswell at Auburn Seminary
Houston Shifa Services Foundation
Human Rights First
Imam Husain Islamic Center
Imamia Medics International, US (IMI US)
Independent Viewpoints
Indian Muslim Relief & Charities
Interfaith Alliance
International Institute of Tolerance
Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati
Islamic Center of Long Island
Islamic Center of Zahra
Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)
Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA)

Islamic Networks Group (ING)
Islamic Society of Greater Houston
Masjid Darul Quran (MDQ)
Michigan Muslim Community Council
Military Religious Freedom Foundation
Memon Organization of North America
Muslim Advocates
Muslim American Community Association
Muslim Bar Association of Chicago
Muslim Bar Association of New York
Muslim Bar Association of Southern California
Muslim Civil Liberties Union
Muslim Consultative Network (MCN)
Muslim Legal Fund of America (MLFA)
Muslim Progressive Traditionalist Alliance
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Muslims for Peace, Inc
NAACP
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Muslim Law Students Association
National Network for Arab American Communities
Network of Arab American Professionals
Organization of North American Shia Ithnasheri Muslim Communities
Pakistani American Public Affairs Council (PAKPAC)
Programs in Religious, Interfaith, and Spirituality Matters (PRISM) at the
University of Pennsylvania
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
Rabbis for Human Rights North America
Rights Working Group
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
Shia Rights Watch, Defending Justice and Rights
Sikh Coalition
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Asian American Policy & Research Institute
South Asian Bar Association of New York
South Asian Network
The Interfaith Center of New York
UIC Asian American Studies Program, University of Illinois at Chicago
Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Muslims of America
United Sikhs
United States Catholic Mission Association
Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA)

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University of Pennsylvania Muslim Students Association
Voices for Freedom
Women in Islam Inc.