

Statement of 81 Civil, Human Rights, and Faith Based Groups

Serious Concerns Regarding Harm to American Muslim Civil Society from Terrorism Designation

Media reports suggest that the Trump administration is considering designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. The undersigned coalition of organizations is deeply concerned that such a designation could lead to the stigmatization and targeting of American Muslim civil society, including non-profits, charities, religious organizations, and activists.

For several years, fringe anti-Muslim voices have called for the designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist group, and framed American Muslim civil society and leaders as suspect or criminal through guilt by spurious association. We note that numerous scholars and national security and foreign policy experts from across the political spectrum have voiced concern regarding the validity of such a designation. We are particularly concerned about the effects of such a designation on American Muslim civil society, including non-citizens, refugees, and asylum seekers. Even without a formal designation, some have used false “six degrees of separation” accusations about the Muslim Brotherhood as a way to smear prominent Muslims, American Muslim civic and religious institutions, as well as a range of other people. Accusations from government officials can have the power to destroy reputations and chill lawful activity, including freedom of worship, association, expression, and charitable giving.

A designation would intensify this smear tactic. Indeed, many baseless accusations have already come from White House officials, as well as members of Congress. For example, Steve Bannon, the President’s Chief Strategist, has stated that his former news organization, Breitbart, has linked Tim Kaine, the 2016 Democratic nominee for vice president, to the Muslim Brotherhood. Witnesses called before Congress have, without evidence, claimed that the two American Muslim members of the House of Representatives, Keith Ellison and Andre Carson, supported terrorism because they attended Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) events.

Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization could lead to a witch-hunt against Muslim civil society in the U.S. It could also open the door to the threat of legal action by the government against Muslims and civil society organizations by invoking overbroad and unfair laws and executive orders regarding designated entities. For example, individuals could be criminally prosecuted for providing support, services, resources, expert advice or assistance to the Muslim Brotherhood without any intent to support terrorist activity. A designation could also result in unconstitutional asset seizures and effective shut-downs of civil society and rights groups. Despite court rulings requiring probable cause and due process when the Treasury Department seizes Americans’ assets, the Department has not changed its internal regulations. The Department takes the view that it can block or freeze the assets of any individual or organization that is providing ‘financial, material, or technological support for, or financial services to,’ or is broadly ‘otherwise associated’ with a designated terrorist organization. There is no requirement of actual intent or knowledge of wrongdoing. The Treasury Department’s decision can rely on classified information the targeted person or organization cannot see or meaningfully refute, and a blocking order can be issued pending investigation into whether the target is somehow associated with a designated group.

As a result, the potential negative impact on American Muslim civil society of false and unjust smears and investigation resulting from a terrorism designation of the Muslim Brotherhood is high. It runs the serious risk of stifling religious and political freedom and the ability to assist and represent Muslim communities without fear of retaliation.

American Muslim organizations are part of the rich fabric of our democracy. They provide social services to their own communities and work with other faith-based organizations to provide support to others, such as those affected by natural disasters and mass shootings. They run mosques that give Muslims space to exercise their faith and promote inter-faith understanding and dialogue. Muslim civil rights groups work to protect communities against discriminatory laws and policies, a role that is critical at a time when the threat of anti-Muslim measures is extraordinarily high and hate crimes against those perceived as Muslim have soared.

We stand in support of American Muslims and more recent Muslim immigrants in all their rich diversity and against the discrimination, fear, and stigma that we are deeply concerned a terrorism designation is likely to increase.

Signatories

Act Now Worcester
American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee
Amnesty International USA
Arlington Street Church - Social Action Committee (Boston)
Asian American Psychological Association
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Asian Law Caucus
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | Los Angeles
Beloved Community Interfaith Network
Bill of Rights Defense Committee/Defending Dissent Foundation
Brennan Center for Justice
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for New Community
Charity & Security Network
Coalition to Preserve Human Dignity
CODEPINK for Peace
Codepink Women for Peace, Golden Gate Chapter
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Council on American-Islamic Relations - Arizona
Emerge USA
Every Voice
First Church Cambridge Mission and Social Justice Committee
First Church Unitarian, Littleton, MA
Greater Cleveland Immigrant Support Network
Harvard Islamic Society
Human Rights Watch
Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness/Advocacy Network
Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)
Jewish Voice for Peace
Maryland United for Peace and Justice
Media Alliance

Montgomery County (MD) Civil Rights Coalition
Montgomery County Muslims
MoveOn.org
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)
Muslim Justice League
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Coalition to Protect Civil Freedoms
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Lawyers Guild - Massachusetts Chapter
National Network for Arab American Communities
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
New England Translators Association
New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good
Nicaragua Center for Community Action
Old Cambridge Baptist Church
People For the American Way
Prince George's County Peace and Justice Coalition
Project SALAM (Support And Legal Advocacy for Muslims)
RootsAction.org
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southern Poverty Law Center
St. Francis of Assisi Pax Christi
St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Columbia, MD
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
The Aafia Foundation
The Constitution Project
Therapists for Peace & Justice
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network
Unitarian Universalist of York
Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Advocacy Network (UUPLAN)
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United For Peace and Justice
United Voices for America
Veterans for Peace
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - Houston
Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund
Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, Southern Methodist University
Yemen Peace Project