

April 12, 2012

Sen. Daniel Inouye
President Pro Tempore
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Richard Durbin
Chairman
Senate Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Expressing concern over the appointment of Dr. Zuhdi Jasser to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (“USCIRF”)

Dear Senators Inouye, McConnell and Durbin:

The undersigned groups write to express their deep concern over the appointment of Dr. Zuhdi Jasser to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (“USCIRF”). It is imperative that Congress rescind the appointment of Dr. Jasser to serve as a Commissioner. We believe this appointment will undermine the Commission’s credibility and international respect.

The USCIRF promotes the freedom of religion and belief, and it seeks to combat religious extremism, intolerance, and repression throughout the world. In contrast with these laudable goals, Dr. Jasser believes, “...operationally, Islam is not peaceful.”¹ His consistent support for measures that threaten and diminish religious freedoms within the United States demonstrates his deplorable lack of understanding of and commitment to religious freedom and undermines the USCIRF’s express purpose.

Oklahoma Ballot Initiative

In November 2010, Oklahoma adopted a voter-approved constitutional amendment prohibiting state and federal courts from using international or Sharia law when making rulings. Following a legal challenge to the ban, both the federal district court and the U.S. Court of Appeals 10th Circuit held that the state was in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment by clearly favoring all other religions over Islam.² Dr. Jasser, however, publicly supported Oklahoma’s attempts at religious discrimination. His organization, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (“AFID”) “applauded” the amendment,³ even though the Constitution clearly forbids the government from singling out one religious faith for official censure.

Park 51 Controversy

During the 2010 controversy over the construction of an Islamic community center in lower Manhattan, local city officials and mainstream civil rights, interfaith, and Muslim organizations argued successfully that attempts to block construction struck at the heart of religious freedom. Dr. Jasser opposed the constitutionally protected construction of this center, asserting that the issue was not about religious freedom, but “purely about being American. It can never be about being Muslim.”⁴ The implication that being American and Muslim is inimical to one another contradicts our country’s longstanding commitment to diversity and religious tolerance.

Surveillance of the American Muslim Community by Law Enforcement

Dr. Jasser's enthusiastic support of religious profiling by law enforcement is also noteworthy. In the past several months, the New York Police Department ("NYPD") has been criticized by 35 members of Congress, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, and a diverse range of faith, legal, and civic groups for its blanket surveillance of Muslims based on religion rather than evidence or suspicion of wrongdoing. As part of its surveillance, the NYPD has spied on mosques, schools, businesses, and individuals and created maps identifying the religious sect and "ethnic compositions" of Muslim religious organizations, and the ethnicity and national origin of the owners and employees of business frequented by Muslims. Dr. Jasser has strongly supported the NYPD's "successful and legal" spying on the Muslim community, and called for increased surveillance of Muslims in their places of worship, businesses and universities.⁵

In addition, Dr. Jasser is the narrator for *The Third Jihad*, a bigoted film that depicts Muslims as inherently violent and seeking world domination. Following revelations that the film was shown as part of training at the New York Police Department, Police Commissioner Ray Kelly called the film "wacky" and "objectionable." Deputy Commissioner Paul Brown said, "[Third Jihad] was reviewed and found to be inappropriate."⁶

In a political and social climate where Muslims are singled out for scrutiny by law enforcement based on their religion alone, a diverse range of civil rights groups have been advising communities of their right to have counsel present during interactions with law enforcement. During testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee in March 2011, Jasser criticized organizations for informing communities of this fundamental constitutional right.⁷

Association with Recognized Anti-Muslim Groups

In 2008, Dr. Jasser accepted a "Defender of the Home Front" award from the Center for Security Policy (CSP) in 2008. CSP has been called a "doggedly anti-Muslim think tank" by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a group that monitors hate groups in America.⁸ CSP employs David Yerushalmi who holds virulent and hateful views about minority religious communities; he has advocated for prison sentences for "adherence to Islam" and "finds truth in the view that Jews 'destroy their host nations like a fatal parasite.'"⁹ Yerushalmi, "has also railed against what he sees as a politically correct culture that avoids open discussion of why "the founding fathers did not give women or black slaves the right to vote."¹⁰

As demonstrated above, Dr. Jasser's deeply misguided and disturbing stances on religious freedom—rights that are guaranteed to all Americans by the U.S. Constitution – should be of serious concern to a Commission that purports to uphold religious freedom for people of all faiths and to combat religious extremism and intolerance. We strongly urge you to rescind the nomination of Dr. Jasser as a Commissioner.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
American Muslim Association of North America (AMANA)
American Muslims for Palestine
Asian Law Caucus
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Emerge USA

Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)
MAS-PACE
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Legal Fund of America (MLFA)
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
Muslim Students Association (MSA)
North American Imams Federation (NAIF)
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
The Sikh Coalition
United Voices for America

Regional and Local Organizations

Afghan Community Islamic Center Inc., San Diego, CA (Tawheed Mosque)
American Arab Forum
American Muslims for Emergency and Relief (AMER)
American Muslims of Puget Sound
Arab American Association of New York
Arab Muslim American Federation
Arizona Muslim Voice Newspaper
At-Tawheed Islamic Center, Carnegie, PA
Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
Counselors Helping (South) Asians/Indians, Inc. (CHAI)
Darul Arqum Islamic Center of Ames, IA
Florida Association of Young Muslims (FAYM)
Florida Islamic Association
Florida Muslim Congress
Florin Japanese American Citizens League Chapter (Florin JACL)
Greenway Masjid, Peoria, AZ
Houston Peace and Justice Center, TX
Indian American Muslim Council, San Diego Chapter
Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, PA
Islamic Center of San Diego, CA
Islamic Center of South Florida, Pompano Beach, FL
ICNA South Florida
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Islamic Society of Greater Columbus, OH
Islamic Society of Orange County, Garden Grove, CA
Masjid Al-Ittihad, Vista, CA
Masjid An-Nur, Minneapolis, MN
Masjid Annur Islamic Center, Sacramento, CA
Masjid As-Sabur, Sacramento, CA
Masjid Mumin of Pittsburgh, PA
Masjid Taqwa, San Diego, CA
Muslim American Society (MAS), San Diego chapter
Muslim American Society (MAS), Columbus chapter
Muslim Association of Greater Pittsburgh (MAP)

Muslim Bar Association of New York
Muslim Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh, PA
Muslim Community Services of San Diego
Muslim Progressive Traditionalist Alliance
Muslim Social Services of South Florida
Muslim Students Association, Iowa State University chapter
Muslim Students Association, Drake University chapter
Muslim Students Association, UC Berkeley chapter
Muslim Students Association, West Coast
Northwest Islamic Community Center, Plymouth, MN
Somali Action Alliance
Syrian American Council of South Florida

Individual Signatories

Basim Elkarra, California Democratic Party Executive Board, 5th Assembly District / Arab American Caucus Chair
Muhammed Malik, Co-Chair of the Miami-Dade Green Party
Sheila Musaji, Editor, The American Muslim
Rev. Dr. George F. Regas, Executive Director, The Regas Institute
Talat Hamdani, American Muslim mother of Salman Hamdani, a first responder who died in WTC II.
Shams Ghoneim, MPAC-IA
Imam Mika'il Stewart Saadiq, Al-Aqabah Islamic Community Center (Detroit, MI)
Tareq Purmul, Muslim American Society, National Youth Director
Metwalli Amer, PhD., Executive Director, SALAM Center (Sacramento, CA)

cc: Rep. John Boehner
Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Suzan Johnson Cook

¹ Alina Dain Sharon. "Speaking Candidly About Islam," JointMedia News Service, December 5, 2011.

Available at: <http://www.jns.org/latest-articles/2011/12/5/speaking-candidly-on-islam.html>

² Awad vs. Ziriax (2012)

Available at: <http://www.ca10.uscourts.gov/opinions/10/10-6273.pdf>

³ American Islamic Forum for Democracy. "American Muslim organization applauds Oklahoma anti-shariah law," AIFD press release, November 5, 2010.

⁴ Zuhdi Jasser. "Mosque Unbecoming," New York Post, May 24, 2010.

⁵ <http://www.aifdemocracy.org/news.php?id=7514>

⁶ Tom Robbins. "NYPD Cops' Training Included an Anti-Muslim Horror Flick," Village Voice, January 19, 2011.

⁷ Zuhdi Jasser. Testimony on "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and the Community's Response," March 10, 2011.

Available at: <http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Zuhdi%20Jasser%20FINAL.pdf>

⁸ Blog post available at: <http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2011/06/14/report-to-prove-creeping-shariah-theory/>

⁹ Doug Chandler and Larry Cohler-Esses. "Tables Turn on Arab School Critics," The New York Jewish Week, 8/24/2007.

¹⁰ Andrea Elliott. "The Man Behind the Anti-Shariah Movement," New York Times, 7/30/2011.