



INSTANCES OF HARASSMENT OF MUSLIMS AT THE US-CANADA BORDER & AT AIRPORTS

(as narrated by the victims)

Background

CAIR Michigan has received, and continues to receive, numerous complaints by American Muslims concerning repeated handcuffing, brandishing of weapons, prolonged detentions, invasive and humiliating body searches at the border, and inappropriate questioning that pertains to religion and religious practices. The vast majority of the complainants come from predominantly Arab and predominantly Muslim countries, including: Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, Somalia, and Algeria. The process can take anywhere between two to ten hours. More disconcerting is that these same individuals report being subjected to the same mistreatment and inappropriate questioning each and every time they cross the border.

Some have been fired from their jobs for falling behind or lost prospective job opportunities. Some have given up on educational opportunities. Some have stopped visiting their families in Canada. And some simply choose to no longer vacation in Canada. None of these individuals have ever been charged with or suspected of a crime. Yet, they are being treated as common criminals. Such policies and procedures appear to be based not upon reasonable suspicion, rather upon religion, race, ethnic background, national origin, and gender.



Abdulrahman Abdallah Cherri

A U.S. Citizen of Lebanese origin and University of Michigan student, Mr. Cherri has been surrounded by armed agents, handcuffed, subjected to what he described as sexually humiliating searches, and taken inside for questioning for several hours at a time, each and every time he crossed the US-Canada border back into the United States. His car is routinely subjected to a K-9 search. Told his name sounded like someone else's, he is also fingerprinted every time he crosses the border. Mr. Cherri has been questioned for several hours at a time about his religious views, the mosque he prays at, the Muslim charities he donates to, and which Muslim nonprofit organizations he is affiliated with. Whenever Mr. Cherri returns from an international flight, a number of FBI agents take him in for several hours of questioning. FBI agents have even interrogated Mr. Cherri in his home regarding his political beliefs, his views about suicide bombing and Hizbollah, and his thoughts about Pakistan and Bahrain. Upon insisting he contact his attorney, Mr. Cherri was told by the FBI agents it was better to keep quiet about the interview and not mention it to his attorney. Mr. Cherri was never given an explanation as to why he was being treated as a criminal.

Kheireddine Bouzid

Mr. Bouzid is a young Algebra teacher and U.S. Citizen of Algerian origin. In mid-2008, upon returning to the United States from Canada, Mr. Bouzid was told to turn off his vehicle and step out of the car. Immediately upon getting out of the car, Mr. Bouzid was pushed against his vehicle and handcuffed. He was placed in a holding cell for one hour. Mr. Bouzid was asked



about his trip to Saudi Arabia, where he had traveled to perform Hajj, and asked whether he received any terrorism related training during the visit. Several months later, Mr. Bouzid was again stopped and handcuffed, however this time, he was surrounded by armed agents aiming their weapons in his direction. Mr. Bouzid recalls seeing a sniper. Once again detained in a holding cell, Mr. Bouzid was questioned for hours about the mosques he attends, whether he is involved with any Muslim organizations, and whether he knows any terrorists. One agent questioned Mr. Bouzid about his involvement in a mosque cleaning project. Another asked if Mr. Bouzid ever felt like he wanted to kill a non-Muslim. Since, this process has become routine for Mr. Bouzid every time he crosses the US-Canada border. Mr. Bouzid was never given an explanation as to why he was being treated as a criminal.

Dr. Ali Sulaiman Ali

Dr. Ali Sulaiman Ali is a respected scholar, Muslim religious leader, Imam, and community advocate originally from Accra, Ghana. Upon completion of his traditional Islamic studies in Ghana, Dr. Ali completed B.A. in both Islamic Studies and Arabic at Medina's Islamic University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI). Despite being a U.S. citizen, each time Dr. Ali returns to the United States from Canada, he is handcuffed and detained for several hours. He is questioned about his role as an Imam at his mosque, the activities of Muslim organizations he is involved with, and the Muslim charities he supports. Dr. Ali is treated no differently at the airports. Each time his flight lands in the United States, federal agents scan the passports of all arriving passengers until Dr. Ali is



identified and taken to extensive questioning for several hours at a time.

Wissam Charafeddine

Mr. Charafeddine is a U.S. citizen of Lebanese origin. A graduate of Wayne State University and the University of Michigan, and a father of three beautiful children, Mr. Charafeddine is a long-time community activist. In November, 2007, Mr. Charafeddine was crossing back into the United States from Windsor with his pregnant wife and two young children. Immediately upon showing his passport, his car was surrounded with armed agents, his wife and children inside. He was cuffed, fingerprinted, and taken inside a detention cell for extensive questioning about members in the community, Muslim organizations he is affiliated with, Muslim countries he traveled to, and Muslim charities he supports. Mr. Charafeddine described the detention cell as comparable to that of a jail cell, with a wooden chair and a toilet in open view of the guards. Since that day, this process has become routine for Mr. Charafeddine every time he crosses the border. Mr. Charafeddine was recently added onto a Secondary Security Screening Selection (SSSS) list maintained by TSA, which means he is subjected to extensive secondary screening at the airports as well. Upon returning to the United States, Mr. Charafeddine is escorted by federal agents to a detention room and questioned for several hours about his affiliations. This ordeal has resulted in loss of business and placed a strain on relationships. He has been unable to visit his family in Canada. Today, Mr. Charafeddine can no longer step near the border without suffering from a panic attack, due to the traumatic experiences he has suffered through.



Mrs. Z. Z.

Mrs. Z. Z. is a U.S. citizen of Lebanese origin who wishes to maintain her anonymity. In mid-2010, Mrs. Z. Z. was returning to the United States with her husband and young children. As soon as she presented her passport to the CBP Officer, she was told she turn off her vehicle. Her car was immediately surrounded by several armed agents pointing their weapons in her direction telling her to step out of the vehicle. As soon as she stepped out, she was thrown against her car, handcuffed in front of her children, and taken inside for questioning. She was subjected to what she called a sexually humiliating full body search. Afterwards, for several hours, she was questioned about organizations she supports, her opinion regarding Hamas and Hizbollah, organizations she is affiliated with, and her personal finances. The process took six hours. After this incident, Mrs. Z. Z. has been unable to cross the US-Canada border without being subjected to the same process each time. On one occasion, she was pressured by federal agents to become an informant against her community in exchange for an end to the continued harassment at the border.

Mrs. S. M., Mrs. F. F., & 11 women of Somali Origin

Mrs. S. M. and Mrs. F. F. are young mothers of Somali origin who have requested anonymity due to the humiliating nature of their complaint. In May, 2010, Mrs. S. M. was crossing into the United States with Mrs. F. F., another friend, and her infant daughter. They were pulled aside for extensive secondary screening and questioning. They were fingerprinted, had their eyes scanned, pushed up against a wall, and subjected to prolonged, invasive and



sexually humiliating body searches. Mrs. F. F. described these searches as “rough,” “aggressive,” “humiliating,” and “traumatizing,” and said they typically take several minutes to complete. They were also questioned about which mosque they pray at and which Muslim organizations they are affiliated with. Over the next few weeks, Mrs. S. M. and Mrs. F. F. discovered a number of women, both U.S. and Canadian citizens, all of Somali origin, that were subjected to similar invasive and sexually humiliating body searches. These women are no different than Mrs. S. M. and Mrs. F. F. Each of these women need to cross regularly to attend university or work in Detroit or Windsor, and each are subjected to this form of mistreatment and sexual humiliation each and every time they cross the US-Canada border.

Dr. Y. H.

A husband and father of seven, Dr. Y. H. is a White U.S. citizen and recent convert to Islam. Specializing in Emergency Medicine and Family Practice, Dr. Y. H. manages to find time as an organic farmer and beekeeper. Upon returning from the Reviving the Islamic Spirit Conference in Toronto in 2010 with his wife and children, Dr. Y. H.’s car was surrounded by four armed agents pointing their weapons in his direction. He was taken in for questioning — questioning about where he prays, whether there are extremists in mosques in the United States, and so on. FBI agents arrive and ask the same set of questions. One agent even asked why Dr. Y. H. converted to Islam, and whether he converted while he was in Saudi Arabia. Like the others, handcuffing, prolonged detentions, and inappropriate questioning at the border became routine. The same questions about Islam are asked every time he crosses, as if the



questions were never asked before.

Dr. N. R.

Originally from Morocco, Dr. N. R. is a research scientist at a prestigious hospital, whose research is funded by the American Heart Association and the National Institutes of Health. Early 2006, Dr. N. R. was returning to the United States with his family when his car was surrounded by armed agents. In front of his wife and children, he was thrown against his vehicle, subjected to what he described as a sexually humiliating search, and handcuffed. He was taken inside for questioning, fingerprinted, photographed, and subjected to the same sexually humiliating search inside. After several hours of questioning, a federal agent tried to pressure Dr. N. R. into becoming an informant in his community. Upon refusing, the agent immediately retracted his business card and ceased questioning. Since that incident, Dr. N. R. has been unable to cross the US-Canada border without being subjected to the same treatment each time.

Fawzy Mohamed

Mr. Mohamed is a U.S. citizen truck driver of Egyptian origin whose employment required him to cross the US-Canada border on a daily basis. Despite having passed the necessary background check to obtain a FAST membership card, each day Mr. Mohamed crossed the border, he was selected for a secondary inspection and x-ray. Mr. Mohamed was also subjected to questioning that would routinely take up to seven hours — the same exact questions each and every day he crossed. Questions about his Islamic beliefs, his political views,



and whether he received any terrorism training. One agent asked Mr. Mohamed how much he paid his wife to marry him. Another told him he should change his name to Jose, making a joking reference to Mr. Mohamed's repeated detentions. After being stopped every day for three weeks, because Mr. Mohamed was unable to complete any of his deliveries on time, he was terminated from his job.

Mr. A. J.

Mr. A. J. is a young American-born attorney of Egyptian origin. Since the end of 2009, each time Mr. A. J. crossed the US-Canada border in to the United States, he is handcuffed, subjected to an invasive body search, and made to sit in a cell or an empty room for extended periods of time before being questioned. He is then questioned about his Islamic beliefs, viewpoints about different Islamic issues, and whether he received any military training in the Middle East. On one occasion, Mr. A. J. asked an agent what would happen if he circled around, reentered Canada, and came back. The agent responded that according to CBP protocol, agents would be required to repeat the entire process: detain, handcuff, and question Mr. A. J. the same questions again for several hours, as if it never happened the first time.

Dr. Hamad Houwari

A Board Certified anesthesiologist of Egyptian origin, Dr. Houwari is a husband and father of four children all under the age of five. Prior to being added onto the SSSS list maintained by TSA, Dr. Houwari used to travel frequently to Egypt to visit his family. Today,



whenever Dr. Houwari arrives to the United States, he is detained for hours. Federal agents stand near the gate and check the passports of all arriving passengers until Dr. Houwari is identified. He is taken to a room for extensive questioning about his travels. The agents then conduct a thorough search of his luggage and everything on his person, and download all data on his cell phone and laptop. This process has become routine, and Dr. Houwari was never given a reason for this designation.

Mr. A. N.

A religious leader and community activist of Pakistani origin, Mr. A. N. was detained for approximately nine hours. After being fingerprinted, Mr. A. N. was questioned in detail about various Muslim religious leaders in the United States -what he thought of them, whether he has ever heard them advocate violence, whether he knew anything about their private lives, and whether they surrounded themselves with battered women. They asked specific questions about American Muslim organizations. Finally, they asked Mr. A. N. to provide names of Muslims that are active in different mosques across the US.

* * *



Each of these individuals filed multiple inquiries through the DHS Traveler Inquiry Program (DHS TRIP), the only administrative remedy available to them, and received a response along the lines of the following:

“... On behalf of DHS, let me assure you that it is not our intent to subject the traveling public to unwarranted scrutiny...”

“... Please understand that in order to detect those international travelers involved in illicit activities, we must, at times, unfortunately inconvenience law-abiding travelers...”

“... While we can neither confirm nor deny that DHS has records or information that prompted this inspection, if DHS has determined based on your correspondence that there is a need to make changes or corrections to any such record or information, should it exist, I can assure you such changes or corrections have been made.”



CAIR Michigan will issue a comprehensive report in the upcoming months. You can view and download a copy of this report on our website at www.cairmichigan.org.

Copyright © 2011 Council on American Islamic Relations-Michigan