

July 26, 2012

The Honorable Michele Bachmann
103 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Trent Franks
2435 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Louie Gohmert
2440 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thomas Rooney
1529 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lynn Westmoreland
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Bachman, Rep. Franks, Rep. Gohmert, Rep. Rooney and Rep. Westmoreland:

The 42 undersigned religious, secular, interfaith, advocacy, legal and community organizations are united by our work to protect religious freedom for all. As such, we write to raise our voices in protest of your recent letters regarding prominent American Muslim individuals and organizations. These letters question the loyalty of faithful Americans based on nothing more than their religious affiliations and what is at best tenuous evidence of their associations. As such, your actions have serious implications for religious freedom and the health of our democracy.

In your open letters to the inspectors general of the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Defense, and Justice, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, you call for an investigation into individuals and organizations that you claim may have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. The basis for these claims comes primarily from reports by the Center for Security Policy, known for its consistently anti-Muslim agenda.

Those you accuse—including Ms. Huma Abedin and leaders of the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Muslim Advocates—have long-standing histories of positive and committed work to strengthen the United States of America. Furthermore, we take offense to the implications of your actions for the American Muslim community as a whole, as you give momentum to “guilt by association” accusations and betray our foundational religious freedoms.

Senator John McCain (R-AZ) spoke well of the vision of America jeopardized by your approach when he said: “When anyone, not least a member of Congress, launches specious and degrading attacks against fellow Americans on the basis of nothing more than fear of who they are and ignorance of what they stand for, it defames the spirit of our nation, and we all grow poorer because of it.” More recently, Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) provided a much-needed reminder about what religious freedom means in the United States: “...the First Amendment prohibits the government from making a distinction between what is a ‘good religion’ and what is a ‘bad religion.’”

Far from supporting the safety of our country, these accusations distract us from examining legitimate threats using proven, evidence-based security strategies. Moreover, we know all too well the danger of casting suspicion on loyal and innocent Americans simply because they hold particular beliefs. We will not stand idly by and allow our country to revive federal investigations into innocent individuals based on their religious adherence. We will continue to speak out in support of people of all faiths and no faith, and the religious freedom of all Americans to practice—or choose not to practice—a religion without fear of criticism or suspicion.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers in Action
American Atheists
American Baptist Churches USA
American Civil Liberties Union
American Humanist Association
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Atheist Alliance of America
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Camp Quest
Catholics for Choice
Center for Inquiry
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada
Counselors Helping (South) Asians/Indians, Inc. (CHAI)
DignityUSA
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Partners in Faith
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations
Faith in Public Life
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hindu American Foundation
Interfaith Alliance
Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers
NAACP
National Council of Jewish Women
New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good
People for the American Way
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office Of Public Witness
Rabbis for Human Rights-North America
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Secular Coalition for America
Secular Student Alliance
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
Society for Humanistic Judaism
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding
The Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)

Cc: Mr. Charles K. Edwards, Acting Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security;
Ambassador Harold W. Geisel, Deputy Inspector General, Department of State;
Ms. Lynne M. Halbrooks, Acting Inspector General, Department of Defense;
The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz, Inspector General, Department of Justice;
The Honorable I. Charles McCullough III, Inspector General, Office of the Director of National Intelligence