



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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March 12, 2014

Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser
President
American Islamic Forum for Democracy
P.O. Box 1832
Phoenix, AZ 85001

Dear Dr. Jasser:

As-salaamu alaykum. I am responding to your recent letter in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood and out of respect for your past service in our nation's military.

Under your leadership American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) is embedded with groups that are dedicated to spreading false information, fear, and distrust of Islam and Muslims. As such, I see no benefit from a debate as that would entail offering you a legitimizing platform. Severing your deep ties with Islamophobic groups by returning their money and awards, and resigning from your positions with them would dissolve much of the reason for your proposed debate.

I was disappointed that shortly after your letter was delivered to me it was posted online. Your choice casts your outreach as a publicity stunt, rather than an attempt at serious discourse. Given my belief that the public should be able to read both views and draw their own conclusions, I will post this letter online as well.

According to your letter, AIFD focuses on the "need to advocate the principles of the U.S. Constitution." We agree. No debate needed. CAIR values, advocates for, and has pursued legal action to protect free speech, freedom of expression, and to preserve our nation's Constitution. As I and other CAIR staff have been quoted as saying, "The Constitution is the law of the land, and we like it that way."ⁱ

However, AIFD "applauded" SQ 755, an amendment to Oklahoma's state Constitution that would have implemented state-sponsored discrimination against Islam.ⁱⁱ CAIR challenged that law in court due to the law's violations of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The courts agreed with CAIR's challenge, not AIFD's position, and struck down the amendment.

Similarly, AIFD supported the New York Police Department's warrantless, broad-brush spying on American Muslims. Americans have opposed unchecked invasions of their privacy since the founders stood up to King George's Writs of Assistance. There will never be a time when we should abandon such values.

Further, you frequently argue a need for separation of church and state. CAIR has a long established position on this issue. In 2005, a CAIR staffer wrote, "Just as I want my government to not establish a particular religion, I also desire that they not prohibit its free exercise." In 2010, another CAIR staffer wrote, "America's historic success in avoiding Europe and Asia's religious conflicts has been based on

our ability to uphold the Constitutional separation of church and state."ⁱⁱⁱ Calling for the release of a Christian in Afghanistan who had been arrested due to his faith, CAIR noted, "Religious decisions should be matters of personal choice, not a cause for state intervention."^{iv} The pattern in these statements is plain for objective observers.

Perhaps where we do differ is that CAIR believes that a person's faith should inspire their public service and need point only to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King as one example of this. CAIR also believes that Americans should be free to incorporate guidance from their own religious tradition to resolve commercial, communal, matrimonial or other civil conflicts, so long as any agreement complies with U.S. law.

CAIR believes that if we were to allow our faith to receive unequal treatment under the law, then we would be abandoning our duty to other minority faiths and paving the way for them to be similarly targeted. Our faith impels us to be a benefit to humanity and to prevent harm from coming to humanity. This means obeying the law of the land, and advocating for a society in which all individuals are judged on merit, not faith, race, ethnicity or other factors.

CAIR is dedicated to protecting the U.S. Constitution which affords equal protection to fringe groups like AIFD, the Ku Klux Klan, ACT! for America, anti-Semites and anti-government movements, we believe the intolerance these groups represent should be relegated to society's margins, not offered a place in mainstream discourse.

The vision and ideas that CAIR represents enjoy popular support among American Muslim and other communities. Your vision and ideas enjoy popular support among Islamophobic groups, who have rallied to your defense.

For example, on Monday the anti-Muslim hate group ACT! for America distributed a piece by John Guandolo defending you. Guandolo falsely claims "it is a permanent command in Islam for Muslims to hate and despise Jews and Christians." Guandolo also claims that CIA Director Brennan is a secret Muslim^v agent for a foreign power. It is well-documented that your work garners funding from anti-Islam groups, which you accept. Your work garners accolades from anti-Islam groups. In 2008, you accepted a "Defender of the Home Front" award from Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy. Gaffney was a key witness for the plaintiffs in a controversial 2010 lawsuit against a mosque being built in Tennessee, where he promoted the conspiracy theory that mosques want to "destroy western civilization from within."^{vi}

CAIR engages in a healthy and productive exchange of ideas with Muslims of differing viewpoints on a daily basis. However, as long as AIFD accepts financial support, awards and positions of leadership from the U.S. Islamophobia network, it will remain a fringe group. After this letter we will not engage directly with you until you choose to sever your deep ties with the groups that are dedicated to spreading false information, fear and distrust of Islam and Muslims.

Sincerely,


Corey Saylor
Director, Department to Monitor and Combat Islamophobia

ⁱ For example see, <http://www.npr.org/2011/03/08/134370988/a-hearing-to-ask-are-muslims-being-radicalized>, also see:
<http://www.cair.com/about-us/cair-who-we-are.html#Principles>

ⁱⁱ M. Zuhdi Jasser, "AIFD Press Release: American Muslim Organization Applauds Oklahoma Anti-Shariah Law," *American Islamic Forum for Democracy* (blog), November 5, 2010, available at: <http://aifdemocracy.org/aifd-press-release-american-muslim-organization-applauds-oklahoma-anti-shariah-law/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See: <http://www.cair.com/about-us/cair-who-we-are.html#Principles>

^{iv} CAIR. "CAIR calls for release of Afghan Christian," CAIR media release, March 22, 2006. Available at:

http://ca.cair.com/losangeles/news/cair_calls_for_release_of_afghan_christian

^v Video available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aieUdwZoYMg>

^{vi} Slajda, Rachel. "Gaffney On CNN: Mosques Want 'To Destroy Western Civilization From Within,'" TPMuckraker.

http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/09/gaffney_on_cnn_mosques_want_to_destroy_western_civ.php (accessed July 17, 2013)