

“Like racism and anti-Semitism, Islamophobia hurts all of us. In America, it is eroding our civil liberties. In Europe, it is further isolating minority communities and inflaming latent xenophobia. It is perpetuating the neocon wish for a "clash of civilizations" at a time when no country in the world, Muslim or not, can afford it politically, economically or otherwise.”¹

Malik Mujahid of the
Council on Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago

Racism against Muslims: Islamophobia

The repeated insinuations that Illinois Senator and Presidential hopeful Barack Obama, is a Muslim are evidence of the invidious nature of discrimination that is directed against Muslims in the United States and Chicago today. Radio and television commentators who stress Senator Obama’s middle name of Hussein use it to imply he is an “other”, a Muslim, unpatriotic and certainly unqualified to run as president. Iowa Congressman Steve King’s announcement that Senator Obama’s middle name does matter, that his election as president will motivate radical Islamists’ celebration¹, proves that overt racism and is prevalent in the U.S.

Over one-fourth of all American Muslims surveyed, by more than one public opinion organization, stated that they have personally experienced Islamophobia or know someone who has. More than 200,000 American Muslims have been subjected to some kind of law enforcement activity since September 11. Wages of Muslim men have gone down by 10 percent since then, according to a recent study.² At least 31,000 Muslims have been detained, arrested, or deported since that tragedy. Forty-four percent of Americans queried in a Cornell national poll favor curtailing some liberties for Muslim Americans.³

A 2006 USA Today/Gallup poll discovered that 39% of Americans have feelings of prejudice against Muslims. Advertisements increasingly have used anti-Muslim stereotypes to sell their products. The media, unfortunately, easily accepts, broadcasts and rarely challenges hate speech against Muslims whether it is a Congressman raising red flags of fear stating that "we have too many mosques in this country,"⁴ or when Billy Graham's son, Franklin, calls Islam a "very wicked and evil" religion,⁵ or when a five-term Congressman and a Republican presidential hopeful says that America should bomb the Muslim holy city of Mecca.⁶

Since September 11, 2001, discrimination against Muslims and Arabs in the Chicago area has become more accepted. In the immediate aftermath of this great tragedy, Muslims and

¹ The Daily Reporter; Spencer Iowa; March 8, 2008.

² Islamophobia from Jefferson to Ellison By Abdul Malik Mujahid
www.ciogc.org/pages/Perspectives/3292/pageDetailPB.html needs publication date

³ Ibis

⁴ "We have too many mosques in this country," according to Rep. Peter King, the ranking Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee, a prominent New York Republican September 19, 2007
http://www.politico.com/blogs/thecrypt/0907/Rep_King_There_are_too_many_mosques_in_this_country_.html

⁵ Franklin Graham in NBC Nightly News. Widely quoted although no direct reference is available to the author at this moment. <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol6No2/Trouble%20with%20Missionaires.htm>

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/08/06/1997179.htm>

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Arabs (and those who looked like Muslims and Arabs) were stopped by police, airport guards and other officials who targeted people for suspicious activity based on their appearance alone. The American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois filed suit against the National Guard, protesting the strip search of a young woman wearing a hijab.⁷ It represented a mere tip of the iceberg when it came to targeting Muslims and Arabs in airports.

The USA Patriot Act was passed the day it was introduced, leaving no lawmaker any time to read its 342 pages. That Act established guilt by association, indefinite detentions without a hearing, secret evidence and secret hearings. Under the special registration program aimed at Muslim visitors to the US, the government fingerprinted and photographed 144,513 Muslims.⁸

In addition, the federal government has detained thousands of Muslim citizens and has ordered all law enforcement personnel at local, state and national agencies to stop giving the total number detained.⁹ Tens of thousands have been deported summarily and a similarly high number left voluntarily because of hostility towards Muslims.¹⁰ Muslims are routinely subjected to racial profiling which has become an acceptable norm in today's America. As many as 30,000 Muslims have been waiting to become citizens for more than three years even though US law requires only a 120-day processing time.¹¹

Examples Close to Home

Other crimes, closer to home were perpetrated. An Assyrian Church was burned to the ground, with evidence indicating that the perpetrator of this arson was motivated because he thought it was a mosque.¹² The van of a family was banned outside their home in Burbank, a suburb of Chicago, in 2003. Discrimination against a Muslim woman working in Norwegian Hospital was challenged by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Among the insults directed against this employee was to call the holy celebration of Ramadan "Taliban". Cab drivers in Chicago, represented by a large Muslim workforce, have been the targets of violence with over 50 cab drivers murdered in the past 10 years in Chicago alone.¹³

As is the case nationally, Chicago Muslims are confronted with barriers to gaining citizenship that seem to be greater than other ethnicities. In 2006, ten Chicago Muslims filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, top officials at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the FBI. The Muslim men allege that they have been denied U.S.

⁷ Downloaded on May 11, 2008 from http://www.aclu-il.org/news/press/2002/01/aclu_of_illinois_challenges_et.shtml.

⁸ Eric Lichtblau, "U.S. Report Faults the Roundup of Illegal Immigrants After 9/11," New York Times, April 30, 2003.

⁹ An interim regulation issued by the Attorney General [67 FR 19508, 4-22-02] prohibited state and county jails from issuing statistics regarding detainees. <http://judiciary.house.gov/OversightTestimony.aspx?ID=428>

¹⁰ 13,434 were in the process of deportation as of Jun. 18, 2003 (Thomas Ginsberg, Targeted deportations rise, Philadelphia Enquirer, Jun. 18, 2003). *Michael Powell*, An Exodus Grows in Brooklyn: 9/11 Still Rippling Through Pakistani Neighborhood, Washington Post, May 29, 2003; Page A01

¹¹ Americans on Hold: Profiling, Citizenship, and the "War on Terror" Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, NYU School of Law: <http://www.chrgj.org/docs/AOH/AmericansonHoldReport.pdf>

¹² Human Rights Watch. *We are not the Enemy: Hate Crimes Against Arabs and Muslims and those perceived to be Arabs and Muslims*. November, 2002.

¹³ Council on Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, www.ciogc.org/pages/Menu/campaign/cab/pageDetailPB.html

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citizenship for up to two years, in violation of their civil rights, despite passing every test and interview. The men are permanent legal residents who say they should have been sworn in as citizens within 120 days of meeting all the requirements. Meanwhile, "hundreds of thousands of other people seeking to be naturalized" have had their swearing-in ceremonies. The plaintiffs are seeking to bring the lawsuit as a class action on behalf of thousands of other Muslim males who they allege may face similar problems. The plaintiffs have tried to determine how their wait times compare with other ethnic groups. But they said U.S. officials have failed to produce the necessary records under the federal Freedom of Information Act.¹⁴ The Citizenship Delay Project, sponsored by CAIR-Chicago, the Arab-American Action Network, the National Immigrant Justice Center, and Competition Law Groups, has encountered 145 Muslims experiencing similar delays in obtaining citizenship.¹⁵

A Jewish Response in Chicago

According to a recommendation made by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs from a recent leadership dialogue, "Both Muslim and non Muslim organizations should make more concerted efforts to build alliances with one another and create coalitions with institutions that share similar objectives. Such activities assist Muslims in participating more effectively in the public arena and empower the overall coalition addressing the specific policy issue."¹⁶ In this vein organizations across the city of Chicago have been mobilizing to support the Muslim community.

A leader in this solidarity effort is the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA). JCUA believes in the importance of Jews and Muslims working together to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as forms of racial oppression. Beginning on September 12, 2001 (the day immediately following the 9/11 attack, anticipating potential retaliatory hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S.), JCUA created the Jewish-Muslim Community Building Initiative to provide support and promote relationship-building between Jews and Muslims and Arabs. This initiative encouraged JCUA's members to engage in actions to protect and promote the rights of Muslims and Arabs. Vocal condemnation of discrimination against Muslims was voiced by JCUA leadership. Actions included community events such as forming a protective ring around a mosque, created by holding hands among this gathering of diverse faith-based groups. Vigils were held that included advocacy for the safety of Muslims in communities, and the protest of government policies that unfairly targeted Muslims or Arabs. JCUA, jointly with the Muslim Civil Rights Center, led the successful efforts to introduce and gain passage by the Chicago City Council of a resolution advocating the elimination of the most egregious aspects of the USA Patriot Act.

The Jewish Council on Urban Affairs is continuing its work to bring together Jews and Muslims and to facilitate the understanding of the values, religious practices and culture of each. Through the work of JCUA, youth leaders and community members continue to come together to understand the Qur-ran and Torah in study groups, or to play, sing and

¹⁴ Muslims sue for citizenship, allege gender, religious bias Chicago Tribune May 5, 2006
By Michael Higgins Tribune staff reporter

¹⁵ Two Citizenship Delay Class Action Plaintiffs Sworn-in as U.S. Citizens October 10, 2006,
www.cairchicago.org/ournews.php?file=on_citizenship_delay10102006

¹⁶ Muslim Communities in Domestic and Foreign Policymaking in The United States and United Kingdom:
Empowerment and Engagement, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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share poetry as an informal way to build bridges between the two communities through a program called Café Finjan.

Another important program was "Iftar in the Sukkah" held when the Muslim month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Sukkot coincided, providing the communities a chance to celebrate, learn, and break down stereotypes among Jewish and Muslim families. The goals of the organizers are to explore our experiences as minorities, immigrants, and/or people of faith, and to develop a shared agenda of pluralism, respect, and civil rights in a domestic context.. We encourage performances that creatively envision new points of contact and diverse aspects of Jewish and Muslim identities in Chicago and North America.

Recommendations

Racial discrimination, racial intolerance and xenophobia infiltrate U.S. and Chicago culture and JCUA believes that we must not wait for discriminatory acts to take place in order to take action. Among the benefits of international human rights standards are that they focus on equitable outcomes rather than equal opportunity. JCUA advocates that the City of Chicago take action to promote the human rights of Muslims and Arabs. We urge Mayor Daley and the Chicago City Council to adopt and apply international human rights standards to all City operations. The City Council can and should review the following treaties and adopt legislation requiring local adherence to these international legal norms. The treaties include: the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

In addition, local politicians should advocate on a national scale for the rights of Muslims in Chicago. Specifically the city should 1) support the End Racial Profiling Act, and 2) end the National Entry and Exit Registration System (NEERS).