



United Federation for Middle East Peace

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USFMEP PRESS RELEASE

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Times Square Rally Demonstrating Interfaith Solidarity: Community Leaders, Local Officials, and Religious Leaders Protest the Targeting of American Muslims and Arabs in Upcoming Congressional Hearings

New York, NY, March 4, 2011 – On Sunday March 6, 2011, a broad coalition of over 75 interfaith, nonprofit, governmental, and civil liberties groups will rally in support of equitable civil rights for all Americans. This coalition has been formed, in response to upcoming congressional hearings led by Peter King (R-LI), which have undermined the civil rights of Muslim and Arab Americans. Mr. King and his chosen expert witness, Zuhdi Jasser, share a history of repeating incorrect and distorted views of the Muslim and Arab communities of the United States, creating more division and perpetuating stereotypes. As invested Americans, coalition members acknowledge the important work of the Congressional Committee on Homeland Security. However, they are concerned that the hearings will send the wrong message and alienate American Muslims, putting their lives at risk by inciting fear and creating hostility towards them. Organizers of this rally believe one can be a loyal Muslim as well as a loyal American without conflict, and a number of our fellow Americans support this view.

On February 1, 2011, various groups joined together to send a letter to House majority and minority leaders John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi protesting the bias evident in King's hearings. Hundreds of civil liberties groups have signed letters opposing the hearings, including a petition circulated by Faith in Public Life.

Many leading religious leaders are alarmed at the demonization of an entire community. Rabbi Burt Visotsky has said the proposed hearings "are of deep concern" and that he would not "like it any more than if Congress were to investigate the Jewish community for dual loyalty with Israel; it's inappropriate. Terrorism is real, and some terrorists are Muslim and some are not. When he (King) makes it sound like terrorism is a tenet of Islam, that is wrong." Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FEU) has suggested that the hearings should be "broadened in such a way that other ethnic communities and faith communities can attest to the tremendous contribution and solidarity that American Muslims have for our country."

In the spirit of such statements, the rally is centered around the slogan "Today, I Am a Muslim, Too" where Muslims and non-Muslims alike will join in solidarity and compassion. Rally-goers will stand together against bigotry caused by anxiety, misinformation and ignorance to show Congress a united American community which seeks to strengthen - not dilute - our bonds of friendship and trust.

Scheduled to speak at the rally thus far are: Russell Simmons, Rabbi Marc Schneier (FEU), Imam Shamsi Ali (Islamic Cultural Center), Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf (Cordoba Initiative), Rev. Bob Chase (Intersections), Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein (Central Synagogue), Katherine Henderson (Auburn Theological Seminary), Rev. Chloe Breyer (Interfaith Center of New York), Bawa Jain (The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, United Nations), Rev. Amandus J. Derr (St. Peter's Church), and many other religious, community, and political leaders. There will also be a performance by Junoon's UN goodwill ambassador, Salman Ahmad. USFMEP President Sally Kader affirms "I support the rally of protesters wholeheartedly in their efforts to eliminate the spread of misinformation, prevent discrimination against American Muslims and encourage religious tolerance in our great nation."

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