



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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## An Open Letter to President Obama and the Muslim World

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Dear Mr. President:

As you prepare for your historic address to the Muslim world in Cairo on June 4th, I would like to offer an American Muslim perspective on what governments, leaders and individuals can do to improve the prospects for international peace and prosperity.

As an American, I will first focus on what you can do to help repair relations with the Muslim world that have suffered such damage in recent years. Your statements since the inauguration have raised the level of hope for real change in our nation's foreign and domestic policies.

It is imperative that your positive statements now be backed up with concrete policy initiatives that will help move us all toward a more peaceful and prosperous future. Otherwise, we as a nation risk wasting the good will that has been garnered by your ongoing outreach to Muslims.

First, America must champion political and religious freedom, human rights, the growth and stabilization of democratic institutions, and respect for the rule of law for everyone, not just those we favor. For too long, we have claimed to be champions of freedom and democracy, while turning a blind eye to repression, occupation and authoritarian rule. We must hold every nation, even those we regard as allies, to a uniform standard of justice and equality. No other action will do more to restore America's international reputation.

Second, we should do what is necessary to resolve long-standing conflicts, and particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that are the main source of anti-American feeling in the Muslim world.

Now is the time to tell Israeli leaders that we will no longer support the denial of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and that we will take concrete actions to back up that declaration. Israel's wall of separation must come down, humiliating roadblocks must be removed, the illegal settlements must be dismantled, food and other essential supplies must flow freely, Palestinian rights must be restored, and a viable and independent Palestinian state must be created and supported.

We should address the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan based on a reduction in our nation's intervention and on increased support for indigenous solutions based on the will of the people and the decisions of democratic governments.

Third, our nation's elected representatives, religious leaders, commentators, and citizens of all faiths must speak out forcefully against the rising level of anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination in our society.

Prior to the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobia of the type we see today was at the margins of public discourse. Unfortunately, today it is quite common to see and hear the faith of Islam denigrated in newspaper columns, on talk radio and in religious sermons nationwide. Few in the Muslim world will listen to our calls for openness and reform while the faith they hold dear is being vilified.

Silence on this growing phenomenon is un-American and betrays the values of inclusiveness and religious tolerance that we all hold dear.

Finally, America needs to engage in internal reform to re-establish our reputation as the world's standard bearer of justice.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, national security legislation and policies related to detention, surveillance, torture, the shutting down of American Muslim charities, FBI agent provocateurs in mosques, citizenship delays, politicized "terror" trials, Justice Department guidelines allowing race and ethnicity to be factors in opening an investigation, and the dubious activities of so-called terrorism "fusion centers" have all contributed to a contraction of civil liberties. Any legislation or government policies that diminish constitutional rights must be re-evaluated and reversed. We should also change our visa policies to allow Muslim intellectuals and business leaders to travel to America without fear of humiliation or harassment at points of entry.

As an American Muslim, I ask leaders, governments and individuals in the Islamic world to make similar changes and to implement similar reforms.

First, government, civic and religious leaders must foster a culture of respect for human and minority rights, political and religious dissent, freedom of expression, and the rule of law.

Governments in the Muslim world must encourage full political participation in systems of government that abide by the separation of powers and are held in check by independent judiciaries. Leaders and individuals in Muslim nations must also respect the results of free and fair elections.

Non-governmental entities in the Muslim world must seek partnership with elected officials and other leaders in each society exclusively through peaceful means.

Second, Muslims worldwide must offer themselves as personal examples of the Islamic values of compassion, tolerance and moderation. Each individual and family should exemplify the verse in the Quran, Islam's revealed text, which states: "And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all humankind." (Quran, 2:143)

Each nation should focus on internal dialogue with all members of the society, including ideological, political and religious dissidents. Good works and public service must replace overheated rhetoric and wasteful internal power struggles.

And finally, each individual in the Muslim world and elsewhere should dedicate themselves to the personal improvement that is reflected in the Quranic verse: "Verily, God will never change the condition of a people until they change that which is within themselves." (Quran, 13:11)

True peace and understanding will only come when we all - Muslims, Christians, Jews, and people of other faiths and philosophies - cast off the prejudices and preconceptions of the past to engage each other based on what we have in common, not on what has separated us for so long.

I ask you to accept this advice in the sincere spirit it is given and I hope your address in Cairo will help change the direction of our world from the path to conflict to that of peace and reconciliation.

As you stated in your inaugural address, a new way forward in partnership with the Muslim world must be based on "mutual interest and mutual respect."

This decisive moment in history requires clarity of purpose and a commitment to practical action that will lead to real change.

Sincerely,



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