



**STATEMENT OF WADE HENDERSON, PRESIDENT & CEO, THE LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**HEARING ON
“PROTECTING THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF AMERICAN MUSLIMS”**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**MARCH 29, 2011
Washington, DC**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Committee: I am Wade Henderson, President & CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on this important topic.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. Founded in 1950 by A. Philip Randolph, Arnold Aronson, and Roy Wilkins, The Leadership Conference works in support of policies that further the goal of equality under law through legislative advocacy and public education.

I applaud the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on a matter of great importance to our coalition. With recent media and Congressional attention focused on Muslim Americans, much of it intended to inflame racial and religious tensions, we believe that this hearing is a timely reminder that all in this country deserve equal rights and fair treatment, without regard to their religious beliefs, the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability status, national origin, or ethnic background.

Anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise in our country since September 11, 2001. Recent examples of anti-Muslim public discourse include the backlash against the Park51 Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan; the hostilities against the Islamic center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee; and the widespread, sensationalistic coverage of plans by a small, nondenominational church in Gainesville, Florida to host an “International Burn a Quran” Day. We even heard a U.S. Congressman tell U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano that Muslims should be profiled at airports.

The sad fact is that American Muslims, Arabs and Sikhs are already being profiled at airports. Consider the June 2010 testimony of Amardeep Singh, director of programs for the Sikh Coalition before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the House Judiciary. . Singh, a second-generation American, described how, on a return trip from a family vacation in Mexico, he was

pulled aside and forced to hold his 18-month old son Azaad while the boy was patted down, and his Elmo book was searched.

Such absurd practices are not based on sound policy. Though profiling was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, “[Restoring a National Consensus: The Need to End Racial Profiling in America](#),” a report just released by The Leadership Conference, documents how racial profiling persists, often encouraged by misguided federal policies. Our report describes how the bipartisan national consensus to end racial profiling that had developed prior to 9/11 has all but evaporated in the 10 years following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The report illustrates how the use of racial profiling has expanded, not only in the counterterrorism context, but also in the context in which it originally arose—the fight against drug trafficking and other street-level crimes—as well as in the effort to enforce immigration laws.

As our report documents, since the 9/11 attacks, the federal government has focused massive investigatory resources on Arabs and Muslims, and those presumed to be Arabs or Muslims, singling them out for questioning, detention, and other law enforcement activities. Among the law enforcement activities that enshrine profiling under the guise of counterterrorism and immigration enforcement are: the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), which requires certain individuals from predominantly Muslim countries to register with the federal government and be fingerprinted, photographed and interrogated; Operation Front Line (OFL), intended to “detect, deter, and disrupt terror operations” by amassing a list of targeted individuals for investigation, the overwhelming majority of whom were Muslims; Customs and Border Patrol guidance allowing for border searches without individualized suspicion; and the FBI’s Terrorist Screening Center, which created watch lists that both misidentified and over-classified individuals. These activities contribute to the belief that it is acceptable to treat Muslims and Arabs as suspect--and that cannot continue. It is not only the right to the free exercise of religion, but a right to safety from physical threat or harm, that is at stake. By enforcing practices that profile one group, law enforcement officials are fueling discriminatory and inaccurate beliefs. Such beliefs, in turn, may stimulate hateful and violent reactions.

Hate crime activity against Muslim Americans is a serious concern. As our 2009 report “[Confronting the New Faces of Hate: Hate Crimes in America](#)” documents, the number of hate crimes directed against Arab Americans, Muslims, and Sikhs escalated dramatically following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and continues to remain above the pre-2001 levels. While the 2009 enactment of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act will go a long way toward reducing the number of hate crimes in this country, we know that many hate crimes against Arab Americans, Muslims and Sikhs continue to go unreported. Hate crimes are not only intended to intimidate the individual being attacked, but to impact all members of the victim’s community, creating an atmosphere of fear, distrust, and isolation of targeted communities, tearing apart the fabric of American society.

The charged, vitriolic environment that we now face must change. Muslim, Arab and Sikh Americans are our neighbors, our teachers, our doctors, our firefighters, and our taxi drivers. They are an essential a component of the American patchwork. And they must not be demonized or ostracized or physically threatened because of the religion they choose to practice or the color of their skin.

It is hearings like this one, focusing on the importance of just and equal treatment for American Muslims, which will help heal the wounds and bridge the gap. As we witness the devastation around the world—ranging from the national disasters facing Japan or political violence in Libya—we must come together to

recognize the greatness of this nation, which comes from our diversity, our tolerance, our cooperation, and our respect. We must work together to honor the founding principles of this nation, and to welcome all to live and worship in safety and freedom.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.