



Shoulder to Shoulder

Standing with American Muslims; Upholding American Values

Keeping Our Communities Open to American Muslims

A Statement of Principles from Faith Leaders of Shoulder to Shoulder

As leaders of a number of religious groups in this country, we are deeply disturbed by recent reports that a growing number of businesses across America have declared themselves to be “Muslim-free zones,” the latest of which is a gun range in Oktaha, Oklahoma. There have been far too many cases like this one across our nation: from Kentucky to New York, New Hampshire to Florida. These declarations are anti-American, and they are an affront to all religious groups in America.

The “Muslim-free Zone” declarations are not simply isolated, singular incidents that target American Muslims. Rather, while these acts banning Muslims from entering business establishments around the country are a particularly blatant act of discrimination, this is only the latest development in an every-growing wave of anti-Muslim discrimination across the country. From local zoning boards trying to block the building of mosques, to city councils and state legislatures using anti-foreign law measures to denigrate local Muslim communities, there has been a campaign to close our communities to American Muslims. The recent organized opposition to the construction of a Muslim cemetery by residents of Farmersville, Texas, highlights the trend of people in towns and cities across the country expressing in public their opposition to treating American Muslims as full and respected citizens of this nation, with equal rights and access to public accommodations.

The move to ban a particular identity group from patronizing a business harkens back to an era in American history of which we are not proud, when businesses refused service to Americans based on race. New arrivals to the United States from particular countries have also borne the brunt of prejudice in ways out of line with a free and democratic society. Discrimination against particular identity groups does not belong in the present or future of this nation, and as faith leaders in America, we stand firmly against the decisions by these businesses, zoning committees, and local governments, to discriminate against Muslim residents of their communities. Furthermore, this type of blatant discrimination is in violation of US law, encoded in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We came together as a nation a generation ago to make sure our communities and businesses are open to all, and we should not go back.

Our religious organizations are standing up to say a resounding “no” to this ongoing upsurge of bigotry and discrimination directed against American Muslims. Through our work with partners of many faith traditions and by joining together as members

of Shoulder to Shoulder, a national interfaith coalition against anti-Muslim bigotry, we welcome American Muslims into our communities. We are committed to our core religious values of welcoming the stranger and treating people of another background as we ourselves would want to be treated. We hope all Americans will join with us in rejecting efforts to wrongly scapegoat American Muslims, or Americans of any faith, ethnicity or identity.

Let us never forget that our nation was founded upon the ideal of religious freedom for all; it is this value upon which all of us rely, whether or not we identify with a faith tradition. If we allow discrimination against a particular religious group to take root, we are opening the door for all religious communities to become the next targets. We must therefore work collectively to uphold the equal rights for all religious communities in this country, if we are to protect the freedoms sacred to us all.

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