



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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**STATEMENT OF  
ALBERT FOX CAHN, ESQ.  
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COUNCIL ON AMERICAN ISLAMIC RELATIONS, NEW YORK**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

**FOR A HEARING CONCERNING  
RES. 1230-2016, DECLARING SUPPORT FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITIES.**

**PRESENTED  
OCTOBER 11, 2016**

Good morning, my name is Albert Fox Cahn, and I'm the Director of Strategic Litigation for the New York Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations. I speak today in support of Resolution 1230, which declares support for Muslim communities, affirms the religious pluralism of the United States, and urges all residents to stand together for peace and understanding. Let me be explicit, CAIR New York does not ask this council to condemn mere ideas or opinions. The measure under consideration today would denounce the increasing discrimination, harassment, and violence being directed towards Muslim communities. This resolution is not an abridgement of any New Yorker's freedom of speech, but rather a condemnation of actions that violate the laws of this nation and city.

Resolution 1230 stands in the proud tradition of this council, which has long spoken out at moments when individuals are targeted on the basis of their faith. In 1903, long before there was a New York City Council, this institution's predecessor (the New York CITY Board of Alderman) had the courage to speak out against anti-Semitic violence in tsarist Russia. In 1921, that same Board passed a resolution condemning the violence of the Ku Klux Klan against Catholic and Jewish Americans. This Council has remained vocal in recent years, passing no fewer than six resolutions to condemn religious harassment or violence in the past 20 years. New York City serves as a symbol of openness to the world, and we should be a leader in this trying time.

Already, numerous municipalities have spoken out to denounce anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, and violence, and New York City should be among their ranks. From Lake Worth, Florida, to Seattle, Washington, from Albany, New York, to Portland, Oregon, Americans are proudly saying that when you attack the religious freedom of one, you attack the religious freedoms of all. Cities as large as Los Angeles, California, and as small as Muncie, Indiana, have already

spoken, and we must join our voices to theirs. We must make clear that the citizens of this great city care just as passionately about the rights and safety of our Muslim neighbors.

The need for action could not be clearer. National statistics reveal a spike in anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, and violence that touches nearly every member of the community, whether it be Muslim students bullied in school, or Muslim senior citizens who are attacked on our streets. A recent survey from CAIR's California Chapter showed that twenty percent of Muslim students reported discrimination by school staff members. That means at least one in five Muslim students have been victimized by the very officials who are supposed to keep them safe. Twenty-nine percent of Muslim girls and women who wear the hijab (head covering) reported that they had their hijab pulled off or suffered other offensive touching. We know that these numbers tell only part of the story, that there are countless other Muslim students who have endured bullying, but who are too scared to come forward. Moreover, these students face anti-Muslim bullying on top of all the other forms of bullying that school children must endure.

Similarly, our office has seen a spike in reports of anti-Muslim harassment in the workplace. CAIR New York receives hundreds of calls a month from New York Muslims, a plurality of whom have faced workplace discrimination because of their faith. In addition to those who face outright discrimination, there are an array of institutional biases and micro-aggressions directed at Muslim New Yorkers in the workplace.

The most alarming shift has been the increase in violence and hate crimes directed at the Muslim community. According to the California State University at San Bernardino (CSUSB), anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by at least 78% in 2015, the most recent year on record. This analysis was based on a partial 2015 dataset, making it likely that the total is higher. According to Brian Levin, Director of CSUSB's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2015's rate of anti-Muslim crimes was the "highest since 2001 and the second highest on record." Additionally, according to a Georgetown University study published earlier this year, anti-Muslim violence is so high that a Muslim American is six to nine times more likely to suffer an attack today than prior to 9/11.

These numbers can be numbing, but behind each of these statistics is a heartbreaking story. Just a month ago, two young Muslim mothers were attacked in broad daylight on the streets of Brooklyn. They were targeted as they pushed strollers with their young babies. The woman who allegedly attacked these women, punched and kicked them, toppling a stroller to the ground, and trying to remove the victims' head-coverings. As she attacked, the assailant allegedly said "this is America — you shouldn't be different from us."

Ladies and gentleman, by passing Resolution 1230, you can make it clear that yes, in America you can be different. In this country, in this city, diversity is not something to be feared, it's the lifeblood of our democracy and the defining virtue of our city. Resolution 1230 says that New York City should be a place where you can live in peace, no matter your faith. As a Jewish New Yorker who works each and every day on behalf of the Muslim Community, I'm grateful to see the support

and solidarity from across this city's faith community. The speakers in this room know that if anyone is unsafe to practice their faith, none of us are safe to practice our faith. I thank you for your time and urge you to seek the swift adoption of this resolution.