

August 17, 2016

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

The undersigned civil rights, faith-based, community and advocacy groups are deeply saddened and troubled by the tragic murders of two Muslim men on Saturday in Queens, New York. We thank you for your strong words in support of the New York Muslim community and appreciate your leadership during this difficult time.

We understand that a suspect has been arrested and charged, and we write to urge law enforcement officials to examine thoroughly and objectively all possible motives for the crime.

According to media reports, Imam Alauddin Akonjee, a religious leader at the Al-Furqan Jame mosque in Ozone Park, and his assistant, Thara Miah, were shot while walking together outside of the mosque shortly after completing prayers. According to witnesses and video footage, a man approached the two men from behind and shot each one in the head. Both victims were found at the scene with gunshot wounds in their heads, and eventually died.

At a time when hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim are occurring at alarming rates, both in New York and across the country, it is critical that law enforcement officials take these crimes seriously. We were very disappointed to hear initial statements by New York Police Department (NYPD) officials dismissing the possibility that Mr. Akonjee and Mr. Miah may have been killed because they were Muslim. Specifically, NYPD Deputy Inspector Henry Sautner said to media, "there's nothing in the preliminary investigation that would indicate they were targeted by their faith." By making this statement within hours of the crime, the NYPD undermined community confidence that law enforcement officials would conduct an exhaustive and objective investigation.

In just the last few weeks and months, the American Muslim community in New York has reported numerous instances of violence, including:

- An individual shouting racial epithets [viciously attacked](#) a Muslim man in Queens, causing a concussion, broken nose, and lacerations to his face.

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- A man [threatened to kill the Imam](#) of the Albanian Islamic Cultural Center in Staten Island while waving a metal pipe.
- Three men assaulted and [beat a Muslim man, repeatedly punching](#) him as he was leaving his mosque in Queens. The victim suffered multiple broken bones, a concussion, and fractured ribs.
- A Muslim [man was punched numerous times and thrown to the ground](#) on his way to a mosque in the Bronx.

We respectfully urge you to direct the NYPD Hate Crimes Unit to investigate the heinous murders in Queens objectively, thoroughly, and efficiently to ensure that justice is served for the victims and their families.

Thank you for your consideration and attention. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact Madihha Ahussain by phone at 415-692-4932 or email at Madihha@muslimadvocates.org.

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

Arab American Institute

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance

Association of Muslim American Lawyers

Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice

CelebrateMercy

Center for Constitutional Rights

Center for Media Justice

Color Of Change

Council on American-Islamic Relations

CREDO

EmergeUSA

Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement

The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU)

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

Interfaith Alliance

Interfaith Center of New York

Metropolitan Community Church of New York

MoveOn.org

Muslim Advocates

Muslim Bar Association of New York

Muslim Justice League

Muslim Public Affairs Council

Muslim Wellness Foundation

NAACP

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National Asian Pacific American Bar Association

National Black Justice Coalition

National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

National Council of Jewish Women

National LGBTQ Task Force

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Progressive Congress Action Fund

Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)

The Sikh Coalition

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

South Asian Network

Turning Point for Women and Families

Women in Islam Inc.

cc: Ms. Vanita Gupta
Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice