February 13, 2015

The Honorable Eric Holder
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Holder,

The undersigned civil rights, faith, community and advocacy groups are deeply saddened by the tragic killing of three vibrant young, Arab-American Muslims in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, earlier this week. We write to urge you to open a full and rigorous federal hate crime investigation and to publicly condemn this heinous attack.

Deah Shaddy Barakat (23 years old), his wife Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha (21 years old), and her sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha (19 years old), were brutally murdered in their home in Chapel Hill on the evening of Tuesday, February 10. Chapel Hill police have arrested Craig Stephen Hicks, a neighbor of the young students, and charged him with three counts of first-degree murder. Though details about this incident continue to unfold, many accounts suggest that these attacks were motivated by hate. Some have suggested that this incident was the culmination of an ongoing parking dispute between the neighbors. The family of the victims, however, has strongly refuted that a parking dispute was the motive for the crime. The father of the Abu-Salha sisters said that Mr. Hicks “picked on my daughter and her husband a couple of times before, and he talked with them with his gun in his belt. And they were uncomfortable with him, but they did not know he would go this far.” The circumstances surrounding this incident—previous threats by Mr. Hicks, combined with the sentiment expressed in Mr. Hicks’ social media posts—warrant a federal hate crime investigation.

These killings come in the wake of a disturbing rise in especially threatening and vitriolic anti-Muslim rhetoric and activities. In recent weeks, after the release of the movie American Sniper, many tweeted hateful and deplorable messages demeaning to Muslims and Arabs. For example, one user tweeted that the film “makes me wanna go shoot some f**kin Arabs,” while another stated that “American sniper made me appreciate soldiers 100x more and hate Muslims 1000000x more.” On Saturday, January 17, 2015, outside a Muslim community event in Garland, Texas, hundreds of protesters shouted hateful messages and comments at attendees. Some of the protesters brandished guns, creating a threatening and hostile environment for families attending the event. Also, last month, a podcast host based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, suggested over Twitter that his readers look up a list of mosques and Islamic schools in the United States (he provided them a link to a community website that compiles the names and locations of these institutions) and then attack them with guns and other heavy ammunition pictured in his tweet.

With hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim alarmingly on the rise in recent years, your leadership is crucial to help stem the tide of hate. We urge
you to open a full and rigorous federal hate crime investigation into the killing of the three Muslim students. We further urge you to hold a press conference announcing the investigation and/or an indictment relating to this vicious attack. Federal leadership is necessary in this case in order to send the strongest message to the public that acts of violence like these have no place in a civil society and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. This would be the first time, to our knowledge, that a U.S. Attorney General has held a press conference to announce a federal investigation or indictment of a potential hate crime against members of the American Muslim, Arab, Sikh or South Asian communities.

The heinous attack in Chapel Hill is being deeply felt throughout the American Muslim community. As American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim now, more than ever, fear for their safety, the American people need to hear a strong message from our nation's chief law enforcement officer.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

9to5
Academi Watch
ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services)
Advancing Justice | AAJC
Afghan Student Association
African American Islamic Institute (AAII)
AKNY - Greece Solidarity Movement
Al-Awda Cleveland
American Arab Forum
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Center for Outreach
American Muslim Advisory Council (AMAC)
American Syrian Arab Cultural Association
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
AMP
Apna Ghar, Inc. (Our Home)
Arab American Action Network
Arab American Association of New York
Arab American Institute
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
Association of Muslim American Lawyers
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Blacks in Law Enforcement of America
Campaign for Peace and Democracy
Casa Latina
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for New Community
ColorOfChange.org
Contra Costa Interfaith Council
COSMOS
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC)
Council of Peoples Organization
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Darul Islah
DRUM - South Asian Organizing Center
Duke Islamic Studies Center
East Bay Immigrant Youth Coalition
Emerge USA
Freemuslim Association Inc.
Georgia Association of Muslim Lawyers
Georgia Tech Muslim Students Association
Greater Cleveland Immigrant Support Network
Hikmah Institute
Hillel of Cal Poly Pomona
Human Rights Campaign
Islamic Society of Greater Houston
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Imam Ali Foundation
Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya, (I.M.A.M.)
Imam Shirazi Foundation
Imamia Medics International
Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights
Interfaith Center of New York
International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
Islamic Center of Long Island
Islamic Center of Naperville
Islamic Center of South Jersey
Islamic Masumeen Center
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Islamic Society of Central Jersey
Islamic Society of Milwaukee
Islamic Society of North America
Jafaria Islamic Society
KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
MAS Youth
Masjid Al-Farooq
Masjid Annur Islamic Center
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Masjid Waarith ud Deen
MECCA
Michigan Muslim Community Council
Midwest Islamic Center
Mohsena Memorial Foundation Inc.
Mosque Foundation
MSA West
Muharram In Manhattan
Muslim Advocates
Muslim American Society
Muslim American Society of Brooklyn and Staten Island
Muslim American Society, Greater Los Angeles Chapter
Muslim Bar Association of Chicago
Muslim Bar Association of New York
Muslim Bar Association of Southern California
Muslim Communities Association of South Florida
Muslim Community Network
Muslim Law Students Association of Chapman University Dale E. Fowler School of Law
Muslim Legal Fund of America
Muslim Progressive Traditionalist Alliance
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Muslim Student Association at UC Davis
Muslim Student Association Cal Poly SLO
Muslim Wellness Foundation
Muslims for Peace
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
National Center for Jewish Healing
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Lawyers Guild
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Network for Arab American Communities
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
National Urban League
NC Peace Action
Network Against Islamophobia, A Project of Jewish Voice for Peace
Network of Arab-American Professionals (NAAP)
New Brunswick Islamic Center (NBIC)
New Jersey Muslim Lawyers Association
New Vision Partners
North Carolina Stop Torture Now
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Parliament of the World's Religions
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
San Jose State University Muslim Student Association
SHARE Kentucky
Shia Ithna’Asheri Jamaat of New York (SIJNY)
Shia Rights Watch
Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, Executive Committee
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom – National
Souls March Coordinating Committee
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Asian Bar Association of North America
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
Students for International Peace and Justice
Students for Justice in Palestine at UC Davis
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Arab American Family Support Center
The Christian-Muslim Consultative Group
The Majlis Ash-Shura (Islamic Leadership Council) of Metropolitan New York
The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood
The Muslim Alliance in North America
The Muslim Students Association of US and Canada (MSA National)
The Northern California Islamic Council
The Organization of North American Shia Ithnasheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO)
The Sikh Coalition
UAW 2865
UC Berkeley Muslim Student Association
UNITED SIKHS
United Voices for America
Universal Knowledge Institute
Universal Muslim Association of America
US Human Rights Network
Voices For Freedom
Wellspring Endowment
Women In Islam, Inc.
Young Muslims
YWCA USA