August 26, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We, the undersigned American Muslim organizations, write to express our deep concern regarding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s failure to ensure the safety and security of American citizens performing religious pilgrimage and the implications this has on religious freedom. We urge you to take immediate action to protect American citizens who travel overseas to perform one of the five mandatory acts of their faith and ensure that Saudi Arabia addresses this urgent security matter in preparation for the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage in early October.

The right to freely practice one’s faith without fear of harassment, intimidation, or violence is a constitutional guarantee, as well as an international human rights norm. For Muslims, the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia, is a mandatory religious act that must be carried out at least once in his or her lifetime. Any interference with this pilgrimage is a direct violation of that individual’s religious liberty.

In 2013, a group of American Muslims from Dearborn, Michigan, was attacked during the Hajj by a group of Australian pilgrims because they are Shias, a minority denomination within Islam. The Americans were physically and verbally assaulted—including men being strangled and women threatened with rape—and alleged that though Saudi authorities were present, these authorities did not intervene or take their complaints seriously. Further, the victims allege that Saudi authorities deleted cell phone video recordings of the attack. The victims sought assistance from the U.S. Embassy, but disturbingly their phone calls were not returned.

The attack during 2013 is not the first time Saudi officials have neglected to protect American pilgrims. In 2007, an American Muslim was among eight people who were beaten,.

detained, and denied access to their embassies or relatives by the Saudi religious police for participating in Shia-style prayers.  

Every American citizen traveling or living abroad should have full assurance that the U.S. government will come vigorously to his or her defense if they are unjustly detained, attacked, or harassed by local authorities. These protections, including but not limited to meaningful access to full consular services, must be afforded to all American citizens visiting Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj.

We respectfully request that you take steps necessary to ensure that all American Muslims will be fully protected during the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage, scheduled to begin in October.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Al-Baqee Organization
Al-Hakim Foundation
American Muslim Advisory Council
American Muslim Voice
Arab American Association of New York
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Emerge USA
Freemuslim Association, Inc.
Georgia Association of Muslim Lawyers
Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya
Imam Shirazi World Foundation
Imamia Medics International
Islamic Networks Group
Mainstay Foundation
Michigan Muslim Bar Association
Michigan Muslim Community Council
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Peace Fellowship
Muslim Progressive Traditionalist Alliance
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Muslims for Peace, Inc.
New England Muslim Bar Association

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Organization of North American Shia Ithnasheri Muslim Communities
Saviour, USA - One World Charity
Shia Rights Watch
Souls March Coalition
The Muslim Alliance in North America
Universal Muslim Association of America

cc: Shaun Casey, Special Advisor, Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives
    Shaarik H. Zafar, Special Representative to Muslim Communities