

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Further, the victims allege that Saudi authorities deleted cell phone video recordings of the attack.<sup>3</sup> The victims sought assistance from the U.S. Embassy, but disturbingly their phone calls were not returned.<sup>4</sup>

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,

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<sup>1</sup> Niraj Warikoo, *Metro Detroit Shias Say They Were Attacked at Hajj in Saudi Arabia*, DETROIT FREE PRESS, Oct. 22, 2013, <http://www.freep.com/article/20131022/NEWS05/310220034/>.

<sup>2</sup> Rahat Husain, *Americans Performing Hajj Attacked in Saudi Arabia*, WASH. TIMES COMMUNITIES: THE AMERICAN MUSLIM BLOG (Oct. 18, 2013), <http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/american-muslim/2013/oct/18/americans-performing-hajj-attacked-saudi-arabia/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Harb, *Local Pilgrims Assaulted by Sectarian Extremists at Hajj*, ARAB AMERICAN NEWS, Oct. 18, 2013, [http://www.arabamericannews.com/news/news/id\\_7636](http://www.arabamericannews.com/news/news/id_7636).

<sup>4</sup> UNIVERSAL MUSLIM ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, REPORT BRIEF: AMERICANS ATTACKED DURING HAJJ IN SAUDI ARABIA 2–6 (2013) (on file with author).

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detained, and denied access to their embassies or relatives by the Saudi religious police for participating in Shia-style prayers.<sup>5</sup>

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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<sup>5</sup> 8 *Shiites Say Saudi Religious Police Beat Them*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 11, 2007, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D0CE4DD1E3BF932A2575BC0A9619C8B63>; Romina Spina, *Shiite Pilgrims Demand Torture Inquiry*, USA TODAY, Aug. 11, 2007, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-08-10-704536022\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-08-10-704536022_x.htm).

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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