

An Open Letter About Divisive Media Coverage Following Paris Tragedy:

We are civil rights advocates and faith leaders writing to express deep concern about recent media coverage that exploits the tragic acts of terror in Paris to misrepresent Islam and call for more profiling of Muslims. This sensationalist coverage and commentary, if continued, will harmfully divide Americans on false pretenses at a time when we need to be united. Furthermore, we believe such divisive rhetoric impedes our ability to have a much-needed fact-driven debate about responding to terrorism on all fronts.

The problematic coverage has been pervasive: one Fox News host and program after another [has falsely suggested](#) that Muslim leaders and organizations have not taken a stand against the violence in Paris. News Corp. Chairman Rupert Murdoch [tweeted](#), “Maybe most Moslems peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing jihadist cancer they must be held responsible.” Radio hosts [followed suit](#), claiming that similar terror attacks wouldn’t occur if “most Muslims were against what was happening.” *Real Time* host Bill Maher [alleged](#) that “hundreds of millions” of Muslims support the massacre and even a [CNN anchor asked](#) his guest, a Muslim human rights lawyer, whether or not he supports ISIS.

For Mr. Murdoch, Fox News, and others to suggest that 1.6 billion Muslims, or nearly a fourth of the world’s population, does not condemn, and may even support, the violence in Paris is not only blatant misinformation, it disregards the hundreds of millions of Muslims who fight for the cause of freedom and democracy every day.

Arab and Muslim leaders and groups throughout the world and here in the United States have roundly and eloquently condemned the violence enacted by the terrorists in Paris, including organizations such as, The Arab League, Muslim Council Of Britain, French Muslim Council, Al-Azhar, Union of Islamic Organizations of France, The Islamic Cooperation Organization, The National Council of Canadian Muslims, and the foreign ministries of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and Indonesia.

Further, the expectation that the entire Muslim community should speak out against every act of violence committed by a small minority of Muslim perpetrators has a faulty premise—it unjustly places blame on an entire community for the violent actions of a few and creates a false assumption that every Muslim sides with violence.

It is extremely concerning that countless public officials and media personalities exploiting the tragedy have used their media clout to call for more discriminatory profiling of American Muslims, including former [New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani](#) who after calling for more

surveillance said on Fox News, "If you're uncomfortable with police officers at your service, you must be saying things that are dangerous."

Discriminatory targeting of American Muslims has been widespread throughout the country, and it has failed to keep our communities safe. Blanket surveillance based on ethnicity, race or religion is ineffective, diverts resources and erodes trust in law enforcement that the public should have. An *Associated Press* investigation into the activities of the New York Police Department's Demographics Unit dedicated to wholesale spying on American Muslims in the city and northeast revealed that it failed to help produce a single lead or terrorism case, instead increasing distrust between the police and the communities they serve.

Law enforcement agencies have engaged in data gathering and mapping of Muslim communities based solely on religion, race, and ethnicity without any evidence of wrongdoing, while conducting surveillance of community organizations and using informants and undercover agents. These practices are contrary to our nation's promise of equal protection and equal treatment under the law.

Failing to provide accurate media coverage of the numerous individuals and groups opposing this violence, while also providing a public platform to those who are exploiting the tragedy to call for more profiling has a troubling impact on the daily lives of American Muslims. Not only does this type of rhetoric reinforce false representations of communities around the world, but it also creates an environment in which hostility towards Muslims is justified. As Malek Merabet, the brother of Ahmed Merabet, one of the police officers killed in the attack (a Muslim), [said](#), "It's not two terrorists, two madmen who are going to represent all Muslims."

To those who are responsible for the divisive rhetoric we detail above, we, the undersigned, urge you to pursue more truthful, less sensationalist coverage and commentary. Your viewers and followers depend on you for an honest debate about acts of terror and ways to respond relying on historical context and multiple perspectives, including those from Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities here in the U.S. and abroad. We can help identify a diverse set of resources such as Americans who would be able to add context and provide much-needed nuance to important news events taking place. To those hosts and journalists who have responsibly covered the terror attack relying on multiple perspectives and the facts, we thank you and ask that you continue doing so.

Very respectfully,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Center for Outreach
American Muslim Advisory Council

Amnesty International USA
Arab American Institute
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for New Community
Color of Change
Muslim Advocates
Michigan Muslim Community Council
Muslim Public Affairs Council
NAACP
National Network for Arab American Communities
New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
South Asian Americans Leading Together
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Interfaith Center of New York
UNITED SIKHS