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Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

'Violent Islamist Extremism:
Government Efforts to Defeat It'
May 10, 2007

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Earlier this week, FBI agents arrested six men in New Jersey for plotting to attack Fort Dix and kill hundreds of American soldiers.

These violent extremists were living within our borders, three of them legally. They appear to have had no direct contact with foreign terrorists, but were inspired and motivated in some measure by violent messages and videos available over the Internet.

The New Jersey conspirators serve as a chilling reminder that no matter how secure we make our borders, no matter how effectively we track foreign terrorist groups, America remains exposed to the threat of home-grown terrorism. The planned attack on Americans at Fort Dix is a stark warning to citizens, to law-enforcement officers, and to homeland-security and intelligence officials of the urgent need to be alert to this domestic threat.

The thwarting of the conspiracy against Fort Dix offers hope, however. A concerned citizen – an alert store clerk – told local police about a video with gunfire and extremist rhetoric. Through the local police partnership with the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, the report was passed along to federal Homeland Security, intelligence, and law-

enforcement agencies. Cooperation among citizens and officials defeated a potentially lethal plot.

Today's hearing focuses on federal efforts to counter this violent extremist ideology. What are we doing to encourage citizens to remain attentive to the threat of home-grown terrorism? What steps can we take to work with peaceful, law-abiding Muslim Americans—the vast majority—to understand the process of radicalization and to counter the violent messages spread by terrorist groups? What are federal agencies doing to explain to other nations that America wants peace, protects religious freedom, aids its friends, and opposes intolerance and tyranny?

Last fall, Senator Voinovich and I expressed our concerns in a letter to the White House in which we

inquired about the Administration's strategy for confronting the threat of home-grown terrorism, especially by seeking assistance from America's Muslim communities.

The challenge is to engage Muslim-American leaders in the battle against an extremism that distorts their faith to justify violence. Their outreach and assistance are essential to counter radical messages that can lead some to adopt a violent ideology.

The agencies represented here today have worthwhile initiatives underway to combat this violent and hateful movement. These efforts are directed not only at terrorists and their plots, but also at the misperceptions and distortions that

terrorists exploit to attract and energize new recruits and donors. I will mention just a few.

In addition to its efforts to detect and disrupt terrorist plots, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has launched outreach programs to bolster understanding and support from Muslim communities, expanded collaboration and information sharing with other law-enforcement agencies, and set up Field Intelligence Groups to evaluate local and regional threats.

The Treasury Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence has initiated programs to help charitable organizations avoid being used as conduits for terrorist financing. The Department is also using authorities provided under the Bank

Secrecy Act, as well as international collaboration, to fight money laundering by terrorists.

The State Department's Office of Public Diplomacy oversees an array of programs to tell America's story and drain the extremists' messages of credibility and appeal. These programs include buying advertising in Muslim countries, increasing officials' appearances on Arabic-language media, and establishing a Web site in Persian.

Meanwhile, the United States Agency for International Development conducts research and outreach messages to ensure that people in areas like Indonesia understand the scope of the aid that Americans so generously provide to them.

I hope today's hearing will help us to evaluate the success of these and other measures,

**and to consider opportunities for new initiatives. I
thank the witnesses for their participation, and look
forward to hearing their testimony.**

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