

Department of Justice Backgrounder on Outreach and Enforcement Efforts to Protect American Muslims

On the occasion of President Obama's historic speech in Cairo, Egypt today, the Department of Justice prepared this background document to describe its ongoing efforts to defend and protect the rights of the nearly seven million American Muslims living in the United States.

Enforcement: Federal Civil Rights and Criminal Laws Protect American Muslims

Since 9/11, the Justice Department has investigated over 800 incidents involving violence or threats against individuals who are, or are perceived to be, Muslim or of Arab, Middle-Eastern or South Asian origin. It has brought federal charges against 48 defendants, with 41 convictions to date. In many cases DOJ has helped state and local authorities bring about more than 160 bias crime prosecutions since 9/11. In particular, the Civil Rights Division is tasked with protecting the religious rights and freedoms of all Americans.

Notable Civil Rights and Criminal Cases

- In January 2008, the Justice Department settled a suit against the New York Department of Corrections, over the right of a guard at a halfway-house to continue to wear a kufi, or prayer cap, while working, as he had done for many years.
- The Department also intervened in the case of a Muslim schoolgirl in Oklahoma who was suspended for wearing a hijab, or headscarf. The matter was resolved with a consent decree that allows the student to wear the headscarf.
- The Department has also won the right of a Muslim school bus driver in Plano, Texas, to have his schedule adjusted so that he can attend Friday prayers, and reached a consent decree with Newark, N.J., permitting Muslim police officers to wear beards.
- The Justice Department investigated charges that a mosque and school in Morton Grove, Ill., were facing opposition to expansion plans because they were Muslim. The investigation led to mediation, which resulted in the approval of the expansion plans.
- The Civil Rights Division has also entered a consent order resolving its housing discrimination complaint against the San Francisco Housing Authority. The complaint had alleged that residents of public housing in San Francisco have been victims of racial, ethnic and religious harassment including verbal abuse, racial slurs, threats, assaults, vandalism and robbery, and that the Housing Authority had failed to take reasonable steps to protect its tenants from this harassment. The complaint identified some of the victims of harassment as Iraqi and Muslim public housing

residents, and alleged that the harassment had increased following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Under the consent order, the Housing Authority will modify its civil rights policies and employee training, and compensate the victims.

- In June 2003, Dr. Robert Goldstein was sentenced to 151 months in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to violate civil rights, attempted destruction of religious property, and possession of firearms arising out of his plot with three others to bomb a mosque in Seminole, Florida. Dr. Goldstein's co-conspirators have all pleaded guilty as well and were sentenced to 56, 41, and 37 months in prison, respectively.
- *United States v. Nix and Alba* (N.D. Ill.): On August 22, 2006, defendant Eric Nix was sentenced to 15 months in prison after pleading guilty to interfering with a Palestinian-American family's housing rights. Nix ignited an explosive device inside the family's van while it was parked in front of their home. Previously, co-defendant Daniel Alba pleaded guilty and was sentenced to six months home confinement for providing false statements to Federal investigators during the investigation of this incident.

Outreach: The Justice Department's Engagement with the American Muslim Community

- Senior officials from the Civil Rights Division have held more than 75 meetings with leaders of Muslim, Sikh, Arab and South-Asian American organizations. The Division holds a bimonthly meeting that brings together top officials from federal agencies with representatives from the Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian communities to address civil rights issues. Division officials have also appeared at a national forums sponsored by Arab and Muslim organizations.
- Since 9/11, the Justice Department's Community Relations Service (CRS) has held more than 250 town and community meetings around the country addressing backlash-related issues. CRS also has deployed conflict resolution specialists to more than 50 communities to alleviate tensions arising from backlash incidents. In addition, CRS developed a film for law enforcement officers entitled "The First Three to Five Seconds - Law Enforcement Roll Call Training Video on Arab and Muslim Cultural Awareness."

Additional Resources

- Please visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/nordwg.php> to learn more about the Civil Rights Division's Initiative to Combat Post-9/11 Discriminatory Backlash.
- Please visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/twentyplus.htm> for resources for law enforcement agencies.