

**Muslim Civil Society in the US: Overcoming Islamophobia through Charity,
Advocacy and Education**

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Speakers:

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Mohammed Alomari, Chief Operating Officer for Life for Relief and Development

Nathaniel J. Turner, Policy Associate, Charity and Security Network

Moderator:

Shireen Zaman, Executive Director for the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Okay, well, we're at about 12:30 now, so we'll go ahead and get started. As I said before, my name is Shireen Zaman. I'm the executive director of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. I wanted to welcome all of you and thank you for joining us today. We're very excited to help host this discussion with our partners, the Charity and Security Network and KARAMAH. We're going to go ahead and start with Nathaniel Turner from Charity and Security Network, who's going to give us just a brief overview of a report that they published at the end of last year. If you – anyone who is not presenting can please mute your phone line, you'll hit star six to do that and you'll see that there is a chat box on the left hand side of your computer screen. If you have any questions as we go along through the presentation or the initial panel discussion, please just send your question to presenters and I'll be sure to moderate the discussion as we open it up for Q and A and pose as many of those questions as we can. So with Nathaniel, who will be presenting some of the key findings of their report and then we'll open it up to our panelists and I'll introduce them after the initial presentation. So Nathaniel, why don't you go ahead and start and, again, for everyone who is not presenting, please be sure to hit star six. And if you – if you have any questions, please type them into the chat box. Thank you. Go ahead, Nathaniel.

NATHANIEL TURNER:

Hi, thank you, Shireen. I hope everyone can hear me. And I would just like to say good morning, good afternoon, or good evening for our international callers. So before we begin with our fantastic panel experts, I'd like to just briefly summarize the findings of the report that was the impetus for this event. In 2006, OMB Watch released a report called Muslim Charities and the War on Terror, which chronicled the charities that had been shut down by the Bush Administration for purportedly funding terrorist groups. In December of last year, our organization decided to update that report and we released US Muslim Charities and the War on Terror: A Decade in Review. This paper presents the litigation surrounding many of those cases, and it also covered some of the other issues of surveillance and scrutiny that had become apparent since we released the first report. What we found was that while there were certainly numerous instances of unfair targeting of Muslim Americans, their charities and their organizations, there was also a strong response from the Muslim civil society sector in the form of education initiatives, new civil society and advocacy groups, and a continued commitment, charitable causes, despite all of the challenges posed by the U.S. government.

The problem: Well, a total of nine charities were shut down under the Bush Administration. Seven of which had Muslim affiliations. Under current law, the government is able to designate and freeze the assets of any individual or organization that it believes to be a supporter of terrorism. It is important to note that despite the number of groups on this list that have been shut down, only one was actually convicted of material support of terrorism and that was the Holy Land Foundation. And they were never even actually represented in a court of law during their trial. Even when the government is not shutting down an organization, it can still harass them with unwarranted investigations. Just one example of this was in 2004 when a federal grand jury issued a subpoena for Kinder USA, a Texas based charity that provides food aid to children in Palestine. Kinder had to suspend their fundraising for fear that their donors or beneficiaries would get caught up in the investigation and they repeatedly asked the government what the concerns were about the charity. But they never received any response. They resumed their fundraising, but had obviously taken a significant hit to their donor base. And to this day, there has been no action – no further action taken against Kinder. Nor has the government stated why they subpoenaed the records in the first place. Obviously, charities have not been the only ones targeted. As I'm sure many of you are aware, there have been numerous cases of FBI

infiltration of mosques and community groups, which is an act that has severely harmed relationships between American Muslims and law enforcement. And obviously, also, in the headlines has been the recent developments in the NYPD surveillance of community groups and student groups which was also featured in the report, but I will leave that to the speakers to discuss in further detail.

So this brings us to what I suppose you could say is the silver lining to all of this, and that is that despite all of the negativity and in many cases outright Islamophobia, many groups continue to provide aid to educate and to advocate for a free and open civil society. Groups like Life for Relief and Development, which Mohammad will speak about in much greater detail, Islamic Relief USA, the Zakat of America and many, and many others have continued to provide aid abroad and here at home, such as IRUSA providing relief after the Alabama tornadoes in 2011. There have also been many initiatives, such as the Muslim Advocacy Accreditation Program. That really shows that the Muslim civil society sector has maintained the highest standards for charitable giving. Many have also worked very closely with law enforcement and as I mentioned before, there have been serious setbacks, but also there's been some significant strides made with certain law enforcement groups in the past years to eliminate Islamophobic training material and help them understand and respect the contributions that American Muslim communities have made to countering terror. And finally, on the public front, many initiatives have focused on education and dialogue to help dispel myths and stereotypes, which I will allow my colleagues to explain in greater detail. I will now let the real experts here speak, those who have faced these challenges and have worked to overcome them. So I turn the floor back over to you, Shireen. Thank you very much, everyone.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you, Nathaniel. What we're going to do now is I'm going to sort of take the moderator's prerogative and ask a few initial questions. Again, I would ask anyone who is not a presenter to please mute your phone line. You can do that by hitting star six and if you have any questions as we go through – either from Nathaniel's presentation or as we start our initial discussion with the panelists, please go ahead and type that box, I think that's kind of the best way to handle questions, so that you can write them as they come up and we can handle them during the open Q and A session. So just by way of brief

introduction, and Mohammad if you want to go ahead and turn on your camera, we'll be able to see you as well, I wanted to just introduce the other members of our panel. Engy Abdelkader is a legal fellow with us here at ISPU and also vice president of KARAMAH. She is a human rights attorney based in New York. Dr. Azizah al-Hibri is the founder and chair of KARAMAH, which is the Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights. And she's also a professor at the TC Williams school of law at the University of Richmond. And Mohammad Alomari is the chief operating officer for the Organization Relief – Life for Relief and Development. So thank you all for joining us here virtually. It's nice to be able to sort of see everyone as well as interact with you via the webinar. So again, for those of you who have questions as we go along, please type them in the chat box, I'll try and field them to our presenters. But I'd like to open up, actually, with just a general question. All of you are sort of active in civil society, related to Muslim communities and have been working on some of these issues that Charity and Security Network discussed in their report. I'm interested in just your initial feedback, very briefly, maybe you can reflect for a few minutes on some of the findings that Nathaniel presented and sort of how you feel the sector has been impacted in general over the last ten years. We'll get into some of your specific organizations' work as follow-up, but just, you know, what are your initial reactions to this report and – about the findings? So why don't we go ahead and start maybe with Dr. al-Hibri?

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

Yes. It is an important question and your report mentions that Muslims have continued their charitable giving. However, one fact resulting from the post 9/11 policies and the 2002 raids on major Muslim educational institutions and Muslim leaders' homes in Virginia is the redirection and reduction of donations. Instead of sending these donations to the needy abroad, the donations were redirected to others in the US. That is a good result, focusing on the domestic scene, although at times there may be greater needs abroad. So, this redirection did of course, eliminate foreign giving totally. The other important aspect of this situation is that charitable giving by the Muslim community was reduced from its earlier levels. These policies and raids continue to have a chilling effect. Once the laws are revised to allow for reasonable safe harbors, the Muslim community could do a lot more domestically and globally to support Muslims and various humanitarian causes that are dear to all of us in the United States.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you, Dr. al-Hibri. And just a reminder, I know a few people have joined, just please be sure to mute your line by hitting star six so that we don't have challenges hearing the panelists. Turn it over to Mohammed now for just your initial response, I guess, to the report and some of the findings that you've seen in more – I mean, your work more in the international sector.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Go ahead.

MOHAMMAD ALOMARI:

I think the report goes at the heart of a lot of the challenges that the Muslim community faces and specifically the charities and non-profit organizations that work for the community for Life for Relief and Development, we've been working since 1992. We have to face challenges from the – whether the government actions are, whether they're the new regulations or the raids and all the other stuff that we have to face in addition to challenges that we face in the community to rest assure that we can still operate, that we are still operating, that they can go ahead and still give without fear. So the challenges are from both sides. When people in the community hear about the FBI raiding this organization or that organization or this office and that office, even though their organization wasn't close or restricted or anything in that fashion, the national, the reaction for the community members are "let's go deal with somebody else." So that fear within the community, it takes a long time to overcome, aside from all the other challenges that we have to face from the government itself.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you. I'm going to come back to some of your comments, cause I think you made some important points there as well, but let me just ask Engy, also, for your initial feedback on the report as well.

ENGY ABDELKADER:

Well, thank you so much for having me here with you today. I thought that the report was an excellent survey of some of the events and challenges that the American Muslim community has been confronting since the September 11th terrorist attacks. And, one phenomenon that it highlights is that of religious profiling, specifically by law enforcement officials. Prior to the September 11th terrorist attacks, most discussion in academic, policy, and legal circles focused on racial and ethnic profiling. Following the attacks, there was a more visible shift to the implementation of religious profiling as well which impacted the charitable sector as well as civil society as a whole. And that, in turn, also has implications not just for the American Muslim community in terms of its having a chilling effect on their charitable giving or going to the mosque for fear of being surveilled, etcetera, but also in terms of the larger American community as well. That is because profiling sends a message to the larger American community that perhaps these targeted groups are suspect. So then we start seeing other initiatives, such as legislative initiatives against Islamic law, for instance. We start seeing private actors engaging in discrimination in the workplace and in schools. We see increasing hate crimes against members of these groups. So all of these factors are interrelated and it is important for us to understand that government scrutiny based specifically and solely on religious affiliation, without anything more, does have an adverse impact upon the greater society as a whole.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thanks, Engy. Well, those are – I think we had some good kind of general feedback here. I want to dive in a little bit to the specifics and, again, just to remind people if you have questions, please go ahead and send them to me via the chat box on the left hand side of

your screen and we'll try and field those as they come up. And also, for those of you who are not presenting, just be sure to mute your phone line, which is star six. So, Dr. al-Hibri, I want to turn back to you, cause you and the work – and KARAMAH itself as an organization has been around for many, many years. And has been working for civil liberties and issues related to the Muslim community for a long time. But certainly there was an impact, you know, you – I remember when we connected, you talked about the 2002 raids that happened with federal organizations. And I know that you – specifically at KARAMAH and I know many other organizations as well, have made, you know, some internal changes to try and respond to some of this additional scrutiny. Can you talk a bit about sort of your experience, specifically at KARAMAH, going through sort of those challenges and how you as an organization have actually now come out stronger from that?

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

Yes. We modified our work at KARAMAH in a couple of ways. One of them was to reach out to the grass roots to explain to them and educate them about their civil rights and the implications of the new laws and the raids. I'll talk about that at a different point. But as far as KARAMAH's internal structure, we decided that, as an organization of lawyers, the level of due diligence required of us is higher than what would be required from other organizations. Therefore, we had to be (and continue to be) extremely vigilant in every step we take. So, we scrutinize donations sent to us and do not accept them until the donor's name has cleared our due diligence process. We have had to put in place a number of precautions to make sure that KARAMAH would not be tainted by any clouds of suspicion, and thus expose ourselves unnecessarily to being crippled in doing our important work. One of the things we did was to buy pretty expensive software that security-checks the names of all our staff and others connected to us. We make sure through our due diligence process, that those in contact with our Karamah circle are not objectionable. Not just individuals, but organizations. Consequently, many sources of community funding that were originally available to us are now restricted. Therefore, we are severely limited in our ability to accept domestic funding from our community, and we are similarly severely limited in our ability to accept foreign funding. So we are stuck with trying to get money from the US government and/or our limited private sources.

For a long time, we had to design our projects in such a way as to be able to get grants from the US government. This affected our work abroad, because people there were sensitive to NGOs funded by the U.S. government. We were fortunate at KARAMAH that we had significant private funding that we were comfortable with and which has allowed us to overcome dry stretches of funding for many years. But I will tell you that the effects of the policies and actions taken by the government in its various departments have severely affected KARAMAH. And I will give you one example. It's not only about fundraising; it is about our freedom of speech as well. We wanted to give online classes where women could join from all over the world and learn from us about our understanding of Islam (you can call it an enlightened view of Islam if you like). We wanted to teach them about leadership and conflict resolution. Well, we took that idea to our pro bono law firm and asked them: what do we have to do to protect ourselves against any problems that could arise because somebody who signed on online to listen to us might be connected as a relative or to somebody that the US has problems with? That resulted in a long memo which created a whole set of steps we have to take even for our online classes, not just funding. So you can see that our work is a lot more difficult than the work of some other organization which is non-Muslim, which could do online classes and does not have to worry as much about consequences like we do.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Oh, sorry. Sorry, I was on mute. [LAUGHS] I was going to say, Dr. al-Hibri, that your comments are tied to the funding challenge and then the impact that that has on your projects and I want to actually turn to Mohammad, because I think that some of those challenges are quite probably similar for you and probably in particular, like KARAMAH's work, the international work has an even added dimension of complications. So maybe you can talk a bit about your experience there in terms of some of the impact that this has had on your work in the international space.

MOHAMMAD ALOMARI:

Yeah. Dr. al-Hibri mentioned funding and for us as 501 (c)3 nonprofit charity, the overwhelming majority of our funds are cash donations that come from the Muslim

community. And we don't get any government grants or anything of that sort. We get in kind donations, which are medicines and food from other American nonprofit organizations, but our primary cash donations for our humanitarian relief work, whether it's zakat, collecting zakat, distributing zakat, or if it's sponsorship, or many other programs that we have, we don't have the liberty to depend on any grants, whether from state or local agencies or the federal government. And fortunately – well, fortunately for us, I mean, it's given us obviously a lot of independence, but also, our success is dependent upon our reputation. And so when we go to the Muslim community and we say we have this orphan program, we have this zakat distribution program, we have the seasonal programs during Ramadan, we have the food baskets that we distribute during the hajj season, the meat distribution, these programs that we go to the Muslim community and say we can implement them for you – and obviously, we give them the choice, we can implement some of the programs here and it really depends on the donor. If the donor says, well, I want my zakat to go to Palestine or I want it to go to Jordan or Iraq or Afghanistan or whatever country that he wants, we're obligated to implement there. We have some donors who say, "implement here locally in the US." So to face the challenges of the stigma that's out there the government raids, the government targeting of many of the charities, whether they were closed out or not, it's a challenge we're always facing. People in the community always come up and ask, "how are you guys doing? Are you still operating? Are you still implementing your programs?" This and that. It's a big challenge. It's a major challenge for us, so overcoming that stigma in the media as well as whatever is out there in the news, is always something that we have to keep in the back of our mind when we go out and communicate and campaign and market our programs to the community. It's a major challenge that – something that's been added to our task of collecting donations. Where it didn't really exist maybe ten years ago. Or wasn't a big part of our campaign ten years ago.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you. I want to spend one more – maybe a few more minutes on the challenges and then also talk a bit about sort of the strength and resilience of the community and the organizations as well cause I think that's an important thing to talk about. But before we get to that, Engy, I know you have been quite active more recently on some of the issues related to the New York Police Department, the surveillance that's been happening among, particularly, student organizations on the East Coast. Tell us a little bit about that and how,

you know, that is connected to some of these other pieces that we've talked about earlier in the presentation.

ENGY ABDELKADER:

So, I think that the report by the Charity and Security Network highlights responses by Muslim NGO, nonprofit organizations throughout the United States to some of the more problematic counter terrorism approaches or policies that are being implemented on the government level. We are seeing increased advocacy in response to this. And, we're seeing more engagement and dialogue with U.S. government agencies and their representatives by those nonprofit organizations - such as KARAMAH (which Dr. al-Hibri founded and chairs), such as the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), such as ISNA, the Islamic Society of North America, such as Muslim Advocates.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Sorry, Engy, we're having a little – you're kind of going in and out. Maybe you can hold the phone a bit closer to you ...

ENGY ABDELKADER:

So, as I was saying, the reaction has been one of education, advocacy, and engagement. And this has been most recently demonstrated by Muslim civil society's response to the continuing reports by the Associated Press regarding the surveillance of Muslim populations in the Northeast, by the NYPD. So in response, for instance, there are regular federal inter-agency meetings that occur at the Department of Justice headquarters in Washington, DC, which are attended by a select group of representatives from about half a dozen Muslim American, Arab American and South Asian organizations with a national scope in terms of their advocacy and since those reports came out in August of 2011, representatives from these organizations have been continually dialoging with the Department of Justice as well as other representatives from federal agencies regarding the inappropriate nature of NYPD

surveillance, the fact that the surveillance appears to be based solely on religious affiliation and not on any indication of criminal activity. That sends a message to the Muslim American community at large, leaving people feeling betrayed and it compromises the trust that has been established with these federal and local state law enforcement officials.

So it's an ineffective use of resources and makes for ineffective law enforcement. And so that dialogue has been ongoing since the AP reports came out in August of 2011. In addition, you see representatives from different organizations in the community, mosque representatives, some Muslim elected officials, activists, people from the – that represent the Muslim Student Associations at the colleges, meeting with federal policymakers. So, for instance, one such federal policymaker who has been very vocal on the NYPD issue is Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey. And he conducted a closed door meeting with leaders from the American Muslim community in his district office in New Jersey on this issue. But not only about this issue, but also addressed other civil rights concerns to those community members who were in attendance and who obviously were representing other segments of the American Muslim population. And so I think that that's advocacy and I think that continuing to engage with the federal government, with policymakers, continuing to educate the larger community is very important because, unfortunately, what the message – the message that is being sent out by the reports is that NYPD or federal law enforcement officials are targeting, are surveilling Muslim Americans for no other reason than because of their religion. The message that's sent out to the larger population is that Islam and Muslims are inherently suspect for no other reason than because of their religious identity. And that's dangerous. It has a ripple effect that can be felt throughout society because if the government is suspicious or is understood to be suspicious of the American Muslim community, then individuals will soon also be suspicious of Muslims and therefore, they may feel – maybe even feel that it's patriotic to discriminate in the employment context against a Muslim co-worker, or that it is okay to give Muslim students a hard time in the school context, or to even perhaps, you know, attack a cab driver who's perceived to be a Muslim. And, that occurred in New York. [UNCLEAR, SOMEONE SNEEZES] And again, it is worth highlighting that the Muslim reaction has been one of engagement, advocacy, and education.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thanks, Engy. For the person who just sneezed, you need to mute your phone line, please. [LAUGHTER] Please hit star six to mute your line, because there's some background noise there. And God bless you, so [LAUGHTER] Thank you. Well, I want to continue on, I think Engy, you made a good segue into some of the ways that Muslim organizations, or organizations working with effective communities as in the Arab communities or South Asian communities have been actively engaging on the government level and with each other. And actually, one of the questions that was posed to the panel is whether or not you had seen more coalition activity in the past ten years, groups coming together, trying to address some of the challenges, but also in light of maybe more scarce resources working together because of, you know, the need to kind of pool funds and pool talent to address some of these challenges. So Engy started to talk about that. I don't know if Dr. al-Hibri or Mohammad, if you all have anything that you would want to say on that question.

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

Certainly. I would say that in the early years, the government's behavior resulted in fragmenting and weakening the community. It instilled fear in people which in turn had a chilling effect on their speech and actions. Other methods used that served to further fragment and weaken the community, include the naming of some individuals as "unindicted co-conspirators", something that your report mentioned. So, all of these developments really weakened the community initially in my judgment. However, the community has adjusted to that and it is now reemerging, seeking more cooperation within its ranks and also with non-Muslim organizations. In many cases, Muslim citizens and organizations are actually leaving behind a ghetto-like mentality to enter the mainstream of American life. They are becoming very much involved in the American scene and understand better their role in it. I think this kind of trend has been great and KARAMAH is part of that trend and is also benefiting from it.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Great. Thank you. Mohammad, did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

MOHAMMAD ALOMARI:

Yeah. I mean, we had situations where the FBI was going around, harassing some of our donors, our large donors, during – just before and after the raid. And maybe some folks might not consider a simple question of “why are you giving to this charity,” but, a lot of the people in the Muslim community are either immigrants or children of immigrants and they come from these other countries that are frankly repressive dictatorships. And you have police or FBI asking a simple question like that, they relate it back to the home country they’re going to haul you away and put you in jail because you gave to a certain charity. And so that intimidation by itself is enough to scare a lot of people away. And I think it’s that part – that intimidation and that – I mean, we even had the government try to scare away other charities that we partnered with outside the United States. They tried to use – I won’t go into detail of which one it was, but – and we complained about it. We complained, we sent letters to the government saying that this is not right, it’s harassment, and, you know, we will take further action, whatever legal action that we can do to stop it because in the end, it comes to – it’s whether you want to classify it as defamation or just simple harassment, it’s a way to curtail the activities of a legal organization that has a legal right to operate and what you’re doing is through harassment and intimidation trying to stop the activity. And so a lot of it goes back to the organization of, “will they just fold?” And there was an organization that actually, they – through the raid, through the initial freezing of assets, although they came back and unfroze the assets, the charity just ended up closing. And I think that was a scenario that I think was part of the strategy. On one hand, go ahead and close some of these organizations that actually got accused of doing, you know, wrongdoing, and then you have some of these other organizations, they just didn’t like them, through the process of harassment and intimidation, they were just hoping that they would close up and, you know, just close up shop and go away. And so, you know, it was through our determination, number one, to – that we are doing good work within the legal framework and we’re going to stand up for our rights. I think that’s what a lot of the Muslim organizations need to stand up and say, as long as we’re working within the legal framework, whatever rules and regulations are out there, we’ll abide by them. We should not be subjected to harassment and intimidation.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you. A question came in about, you know, the current efforts of Muslim relief organizations, for example, in cleaning up tornado debris in Texas. Or I think Nathaniel mentioned some of the work of organizations like Islamic Relief in the US and I think also I would just add to that the many interfaith efforts that have come and the cooperation between Muslim communities and other communities in the US. How does that – how does that impact the credibility of charities in the eyes of the American public? Are there, in fact, because of this kind of push for Muslim communities or Muslim charities to be out there more in the public, are there actually positive opportunities for engagement, education, outreach? Engy, do you have some thoughts on that?

ENGY ABDELKADER:

I think it's important for the American Muslim community, including the charitable sector, to be engaged with the larger American public, including contributing to relief efforts, whether it was in response to Katrina or other, you know, other catastrophes, natural disasters that have occurred. . I think it sends a positive message about the American Muslim community. It underscores the fact that we *are* Americans. It underscores the American identity of that community. And therefore, I think that it is important. And I think that even separate and apart from these relief organizations, you are seeing, even on a very local level, more American Muslims engaged with charitable initiatives. So, for instance, you see organizations locally that are regularly sponsoring participation with soup kitchens and encouraging both the student population as well as the post-grad population to help out. And not just help out other Muslims, per se, but help out other Americans. I think that's an important aspect of the American Muslim identity that needs to be highlighted.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Great. Anyone else have something to add there?

MOHAMMAD ALOMARI:

Yes. I mean, to add further, we responded locally when there was Hurricane Ike, Hurricane Katrina we responded with emergency help, food, water, emergency shelter, to the victims, regardless of who they were or what religion they were. Similarly in Haiti when the earthquake struck there a couple of years ago, we responded with emergency help. You know, a lot of it, it's guided obviously where the need is, number one, and number two, what the donors are willing to do, because ultimately we're guided by what the donors ask us to do. If the donor says, help the people of Haiti, we'll help them. If they say they want their funds going for a program overseas we have to abide by what the donor's wishes are. But we certainly do have a lot of programs that are here local meant to address the emergency needs of victims here.

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

I would like to just insert a footnote about the efforts of helping others. KARAMAH on a couple of occasions tried to help children in a country which had a flood and women in another which had an earthquake. In the country where there was a flood, we were approached about donating a significant number of backpacks for children so that they could go to school in the fall. They had lost everything. We contacted the Justice Department and asked them if that would be okay, because as you know, there is no safe harbor in the guidelines on charitable giving. And we were told: sure, no American would think that a backpack is problematic. So we asked them to put this in writing and they ultimately did not do so. In the second case of earthquake, we suggested to the Justice Department that we send our volunteers to sit with the women who have experienced the catastrophe and counsel them, hold their hand, and so on. In this case, we were informed that such actions would be construed as "material support," and so the various anti-terrorism laws would come into play. When I mentioned this to the then Attorney General, he was very surprised and suggested that we meet about it. That meeting never took place. So the law is there. If there is an interest by the enforcement agencies to close down a Muslim organization for such humanitarian work, they can. There is in the law "material support" language which is very over-broad. It could easily result in the closing down of a

human rights organization. And that's something that we at KARAMAH are very cognizant of.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you. I mean, I think that that's a good footnote. It's sort of important to be out there and to be engaging in partnerships and providing these types of services, but at the same time, I think organizations are more aware than ever of this need to, you know, I guess, insure that there is potentially no problematic repercussions for their organizations in that. Just one comment that I wanted to share from one of the participants, I guess it's not really a question, but along the lines of charity efforts, it's critical to get out the story that Muslim doctors and dentists around the country offer a network of volunteer medical screenings and services to people regardless of background. The participant is saying that no other religious community does that in such a systematic manner. I'm not sure if that's – I'm not sure about that exactly. I think there's many religious communities that do offer these services, but I agree. I mean, I think there's many efforts, including Mohammad's and others, to provide charitable medical services around the country and internationally and I think that that's a very key story. I guess, you know, one of the things that I'd like to sort of reflect on, I mean, here we are, sort of ten years – more than ten years now, after 9-11 and getting on sort of ten years after many of these regulations and challenges have been put in place. And maybe we'll do this – if there are other questions that people have, please feel free to send them in via the chat box, but as a way to sort of wrap up here, since we're getting close to the hour mark, maybe each of you can comment a bit about the future. So if there is, you know, one or two things that you think in terms of regulations or just educating the broader community that you think would be critical say for the next ten years. You – just share that with us. What – how would you like to see this sector change or these challenges change in the next ten years? What are your – what are your sort of rays of hope, I guess, for the future? What leaves you kind of feeling positive about this work? Clearly, all of you have been engaged in this and working hard on this for the last several years. So what keeps you motivated in this, looking forward? Dr. al-Hibri, why don't we start with you?

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

Yeah. I feel that nothing much will change unless the laws and regulations change. Otherwise we are subject to the political expediency or climate at a certain point in the history of America. We have to start a civil rights movement for Muslims so that they will share the same rights as all other Americans. We have to protect the Constitution. That is what is happening now. And this is a very important issue that we should not overlook. Otherwise, we will continually be at risk. That's not a good feeling for a religious group who is supposed to be protected by the American Constitution. It's specifically and particularly a bad feeling for me because I am a commissioner on the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. And when we study other countries and I look at the standards by which we judge other countries about their religious freedom, and how they are performing, I see that we are applying to them many standards that we do not observe in this United States with respect to Muslims. It is very painful to see that, by the standards of the commission, our rights in the United States as Muslims are being violated in a serious way.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

And what about one thing that keeps you optimistic or going in this work, Dr. al-Hibri?

AZIZAH al-HIBRI:

The Muslim community has learned how to adjust to this situation, not by accepting it, but by working to improve its lot despite what is happening-- by pulling together at the end of ten years instead of resenting it, by not being bitter about it. As you say, they continue engaging in charitable giving and continuing being involved with other Americans. So American Muslims have decided that they are going to go ahead with life and do their best in these United States and that Justice and the Constitution will prevail in the end.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Great. Thank you. Engy, what are your thoughts or sort of – what would you like to see change in the next ten years? What keeps you hopeful in this work, optimistic about the future?

ENGY ABDELKADER:

So, yeah, I think it's worth noting that immediately after the September 11th attacks, there was obviously a severe backlash against the American Muslim, Arab American, South Asian communities and that was commonly understood as being a traumatic response to these terrorist attacks. Yet here we are, more than ten years later, and the fact is that hate crimes have increased against American Muslims. Muslim religious employment discrimination claims are at an all-time high. Islamophobic bullying in schools is an epidemic problem. And there continues to be a reported – reports of surveillance, unlawful surveillance by law enforcement agencies of Muslim Americans. In fact, anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiment towards our community is also harshening. For instance, six months after the September 11th attacks a Pew Research Center poll showed that only a third of respondents actually believed that Muslims were likely to commit criminal or violent actions and that Islam promoted such action. And yet ten years after the September 11th attacks, Pew conducted that same poll, asked that same question, and now almost half of the American population believes that and I find that problematic. In part, that's the Islamophobic – the Islamophobic industry, which is, in fact, a multimillion dollar industry.

So it also speaks to the importance of what we alluded to earlier, which is coalition efforts by American Muslims – not just within the American Muslim community, but really with all communities and organizations that are interested in achieving social justice in the U.S. And making sure that we highlight the commonality between our groups. So it's not really just a South Asian problem or an Arab American problem or a Muslim problem. It's, you know, racial and ethnic profiling has been an issue that Latinos and the African-American community have been complaining about since before even the 1990s. And so therefore, it's important for us to work in tandem with all these different groups and realize that we

have so much in common and that we're all fighting for the same goals: justice and fairness, and just having, you know, the American way of life that many people who came here dreamed of. In terms of looking to the future, I'm encouraged by the fact that there is more engagement by these communities, by the Arab American, Muslim American and the South Asian communities. You're seeing a lot more people interacting with the media, you're seeing a lot more people engaging and willing to contribute to educational forums and writing op-eds and what not and I think that that's important. There are even more American Muslims who are actually entering the legal profession and journalism because they feel that there's a dearth of American Muslims writing and working on these civil rights issues of concern to the community. And I think that's important. And I'm also – I tend to be optimistic when I interact with the youth. I'm encouraged by what I see. I think that they're willing to be engaged and so, for instance, after AP reports that the NYPD was surveillancing students who were engaged with the Muslim Students Associations at their universities in the Northeast, many parents came out and told their children who are college students not to engage and not to attend meetings at the MSA any longer. And whether it's at law schools or on the university level, I keep hearing from these students who say that that's wrong. And that they're going to continue to engage, because they're not doing anything wrong and that it is – it's wrong for any law enforcement agency to monitor them for no other reason but for their religion. And I think for me, that's inspiring to hear.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Great. Thank you, Engy. Mohammad, what about you? Thoughts about things that you'd like to see change and then also kind of what keeps you positive and optimistic and engaging in this work?

MOHAMMAD ALOMARI:

Well, what keeps me positive and optimistic is the nature of our work. The fact that we're delivering assistance to the most needy: the orphaned, the widowed, the poor around the world. That in itself is motivation enough to continue our work. In addition to providing an opportunity for being a vehicle for the Muslim community to practice their religion by doing

zakat. You know, zakat is one of the five pillars of the religion and it's a duty that every Muslim has to do like he has to do, pray, fast during Ramadan, make the hajj once in a lifetime, he has to pay zakat. And so for the Muslim community to have organizations where they can pay zakat through is I think a major role that our organizations play in providing this service for the Muslim community and it falls in with the right to practice your religion and let the American Muslim as an American practice the way he sees fit. And if he wants to give his zakat to an organization that's legally registered, legally operating, without fear of intimidation, I mean, that's a basic right that every American citizen has the right for. So those two things are what provides motivation for us and keeps us positive. Now what we hope to see in the future is that the climate of fear and intimidation goes away. We realize we have to do due diligence. We have to keep up with whatever the rules and regulations are and that goes for everyone, every organization, whether you're a Muslim or not a Muslim organization. But we just hope that we can operate as organizations, American organizations, just as freely as any other organization regardless of what religion or background they happen to be of.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you, Mohammad. Nathaniel, let me just turn to you and see if you had any closing comments or reflections on the panel as well.

NATHANIEL TURNER:

Well, first of all, I want to thank all the panelists. It's really great to have a chance to hear the feedback from this report. And I'll just keep it very brief. If – for those of you who would like to read the report in its entirety, you can find it on our website, which is www.charityandsecurity.org. And I would just like to mention some of the work that the Charity and Security Network is hoping to accomplish here in the future and hopefully does not take ten years on, but ten years from now, if some of this accomplished, I think that will be fantastic. It is very important that we fix the material support laws that are currently in place which prevent not just things like humanitarian aid, but prevent even peace-building groups from doing conflict mediation with terrorist groups. This has become

especially apparent in Somalia, where there have been numerous problems with groups being unable to engage with al-Shabab even if it's trying to get them to lay down arms. And I think we also still need to reform the procedure for shutting down these charitable organizations. Obviously, no charities have been shut down under the Obama administration, but the fact remains that the laws are still on the books. It could still happen anytime and in the next administration, it could still occur. So we need to have meaningful and common-sense reforms to prevent these kinds of things from happening and to respect the due process of these charitable organizations and to respect the humanitarian imperative that these groups have.

SHIREEN ZAMAN:

Thank you. Well, Nathaniel, thank you for the work that you all are doing and for this report. And we're here just at about one thirty, so I think we'll take a chance to close out. We did share the link to the report that Nathaniel mentioned there in the chat box. I wanted to just thank all of you, Dr. al-Hibri, Engy, and Mohammad, for joining us today, providing your insights, and especially for the important work that you all are doing. And thank you to all of you who participated and also shared questions. We at ISPU plan to do many of these types of webinars on our research and on issues that are emerging in the community. So we look forward to connecting with everyone soon. Thank you all.

MULTIPLE VOICES:

Thank you.