

Written Testimony of

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Thank you, Senator Lieberman, Senator Collins and members of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for inviting us to testify during this important hearing. The two of us have cochaired a Task Force sponsored by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs that has brought together a group of 32 distinguished Muslim and non-Muslim Americans to examine the Muslim American experience and provide a roadmap for accelerating Muslim American engagement in civic affairs and U.S. political life. The Task Force's report was released yesterday. We feel that it includes many findings and recommendations that should be useful to this Committee as it examines ways to better protect the country.

The Task Force has concluded that greater Muslim American civic and political engagement is urgently needed to prevent alienation in a community that is vital to U.S. security and relations with the Muslim World. Although Muslim Americans are a well-educated, diverse group that can make greater contributions to the nation, they lack strong institutions and sufficient recognizable public or political voices to gain regular access to government and media circles.

Many Muslim Americans responded helpfully to September 11 and condemned other terrorist acts. Despite this response, many Americans continue to view Muslim Americans with suspicion in the post September 11 environment. The present climate of mistrust and the lack of engagement threaten to marginalize and potentially alienate some elements among Muslim Americans. To combat this trend, it is critical that Muslim American leaders and institutions continue and amplify their condemnations of extremism and terrorism and continue to strengthen efforts to prevent radical activity within the community.

Non-Muslim groups and government leaders can work to better recognize Muslim American contributions to national security and improve collaborations with Muslim American institutions. Public statements by senior officials acknowledging the significance of Muslim American contributions to national security and emphasizing the importance of not holding any group accountable for the actions of a few would help build public acceptance and understanding of the community. Further cultural sensitivity training for federal law enforcement officers would also increase the trust and communication necessary for fuller cooperation and better securing the country.

It is in the interest of all Americans to build trust and rapidly bring Muslim Americans into the social and political mainstream to strengthen our democratic institutions and improve U.S. foreign policy. Muslim American leaders should continue to take the lead in encouraging greater civic participation, leadership development, and institution building within their community. Non-Muslim groups and government leaders can work to improve collaborations with Muslim American institutions and provide greater opportunities for young Muslim Americans in government service. Media organizations and Muslim American groups can jointly sponsor seminars to address concerns and deepen relationships and understanding. Leading research and policy institutes can deepen their work on Islam and Muslim communities and create partnerships with Muslim American institutions. An American Diversity Dialogue can be established among Muslim and non-Muslim leaders to examine critical issues in Muslim American integration.

We recognize that the integration of minority groups, women, and immigrants into our civic and political processes has been slow, challenging work in the past. Yet its practical and symbolic importance cannot be underestimated. Muslims, like many other immigrant groups, came to the United States in search of religious and political freedom, in need of refuge, and in hopes of prosperity. The tragic events of September 11 and their aftermath have challenged our security, put the dream of America to the test for Muslim Americans, and called our values as a nation into question. By working together to ensure that Muslim American voices are heard, we will not only increase our own security, but make our domestic and foreign policies a truer expression of who we are as a nation.