



U.S. Customs and
Border Protection

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Statement

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Statement on Census Data

Washington, DC— Today, Commissioner Robert C. Bonner discussed the findings of his inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the provision of Census data in two specific instances that occurred in mid-2002 and December 2003 with representatives of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Arab American Institute and the Department of Homeland Security's Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection takes any allegation of racial profiling very seriously. Commissioner Bonner investigated the matter the very first day the reports came out. Customs – and now CBP – has a long history of safeguarding Constitutional rights. CBP's policies specifically prohibit the use of ethnic background, race, gender, color, or religion as a factor in determining whether to conduct a personal search at the border.

The issue arose from two separate incidents, one in 2002 and the other in 2003, in which the U.S. Customs Service, now U.S. Customs and Border Protection, informally requested information from the U.S. Census Bureau. The first request was for information regarding major international airport hubs in the U.S. and concerned several languages, not just Arabic. The second request for information was part of an analytical effort being made by CBP based on a specific list of countries of concern designated by the U.S. Department of State.

Neither request – and no request at any time – asked for identification of Arabic speaking people or Arabic ancestry by zip code. The information that Census provided to Customs, and subsequently to CBP, was evidently provided in the format in which it is stored in the U.S. Census Bureau's database, which apparently is organized by zip code.

CBP did not release any of this information to any other agency and did not, in fact, use, forward, or maintain the information and the information was deleted.

Because of CBP's border interdiction mission and because of the sensitivity of these types of requests, Commissioner Bonner directed that all future requests for such Census information must be reviewed and approved by CBP Assistant Commissioners.

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