

# American Leaders Speak Out Against Backlash In Wake of September 11 Tragedy

## **President George W. Bush**

*remarked in a telephone conversation with NY Mayor Rudy Giuliani, September 12, 2001*

"I know I don't need to tell you all this, but our nation should be mindful that there are thousands of Arab Americans who live in New York City, who love their flag just as much as the three of us do, and we must be mindful that as we seek to win the war, that we treat Arab Americans and Muslims with the respect they deserve. I know that is your attitude as well, certainly the attitude of this government, that we should not hold one who is a Muslim responsible for an act of terror. We will hold those who are responsible for the terrorist acts accountable, and those who harbor them."

*And he said further in remarks at the Islamic Center in Washington, DC, on September 17, 2001*

"The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war. When we think of Islam we think of a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world. Billions of people find comfort and solace and peace. And that's made brothers and sisters out of every race - out of every race."

## **U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, September 12, 2001**

"[O]ur nation calls on us in times like this to be at our best. If we are to prevail in difficult times like this, we must be at our best. Since Tuesday, the Justice Department has received reports of violence and threats of violence against Arab-Americans and other Americans of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent. We must not descend to the level of those who perpetrated Tuesday's violence by targeting individuals based on race, religion, or national origin. Such reports of violence and threats are in direct opposition to the very principles and laws for which the United State of America stands, and such reports of violence and threats of violence will not be tolerated."

## **Robert Muller, Director of the FBI, September 17, 2001**

Since the horrific attacks on September 11, dozens of retaliatory hate crimes have been directed at members of the Arab-American community, including assaults, arson, threatening communications and possibly-and I say "possibly"-ethnically motivated murders. Many of these criminal acts have been directed at Muslim houses of worship and at Muslim community centers.

I want to make it very clear: Vigilante attacks and threats against Arab-Americans will not be tolerated. We are all saddened by the recent acts of terrorism against our nation. Such acts of retaliation violate federal law and, more particularly, run counter to the very principles of equality and freedom upon which our nation is founded.

The FBI and the Department of Justice are committed to aggressively investigating and prosecuting violations of the federal hate crime laws. We, to date, have initiated 40 hate crime investigations, involving reported attacks on Arab American citizens and institutions.

## **Concurrent Resolution of the U.S. Congress, September 12, 2001**

That the Congress—

1) declares that in the quest to identify, bring to justice, and punish the perpetrators and sponsors of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, that the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans, including Arab-Americans, American Muslims, and Americans from South Asia, should be protected; and

(2) condemns any acts of violence or discrimination against any Americans, including Arab-Americans, American Muslims, and Americans from South Asia.

### **Senator Tom Daschle, September 14, 2001**

“We will be fierce in the defense of our ideals. We will make whatever material or physical sacrifice that is required of us to punish those who attacked our nation and to prevent future attacks. But we will not sacrifice the ideals that built this nation and have sustained us for more than two centuries. Just as we are united against the terrorists and their co-conspirators who carried out the attacks on our nation, we must also be united against acts of hate against innocent Arab- Americans and Muslims.”

### **Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts, September 12, 2001**

“I know that the American Muslim and Arab communities share the nation’s horror and outrage over yesterday’s terrorist attacks. They have issued strong statements unequivocally condemning these vicious atrocities and expressing their condolences to the families of the innocent people killed...there is understandable anger across the nation. But it is wrong and irresponsible to jump to conclusions and make false accusations against Arabs and Muslims in our communities. Above all, we must guard against any acts of violence based on such bigotry.”

### **Senator Russ Feingold, Wisconsin, September 12, 2001**

“As we look for answers and we look for solutions and we look for things we must do, domestically as well as externally, we must continue to respect our Constitution...this should not be an occasion for ill treatment of Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, South Asians, or others in this country. It is wrong. They are as patriotic as any other Americans and are feeling extremely stressed as a result of this situation...we must stand together, all Americans of all background, to condemn these actions.”

### **Senator Dick Durbin, Illinois, September 12, 2001**

“As we identify the sources of terrorism, it is possible we will look to an Arab person, or a group of Arab people, or those of the Muslim faith. We should never allow those facts, if they turn out to be true, to cloud our judgment when it comes to our fellow Arab Americans and those who believe and practice the Muslim faith. Many of them share with us the pain and sorrow of yesterday’s tragedy.”

### **Representative John Conyers, Jr., Michigan, September 12, 2001**

“Just as this horrendous act can destroy us from without, it can also destroy us from within. Pearl Harbor led to internment camps of Japanese-Americans, and today there is a very real danger that this tragedy could result in prejudice, discrimination, and crimes of hate against Arab-Americans and others. The lesson Oklahoma City taught us was the perpetrators of these acts of terror can be evil men of every race, nationality and religion as are the victims. We must ensure that these acts of terror do not slowly and subversively destroy the foundation of our democracy: a commitment to equal rights and equal protection.”

**Representative Hilda Solis, California, September 12, 2001**

"I am heartened by the American people's extraordinary display of kindness and cooperation. I have been moved by how our diverse Nation has come together in a united show of support — men and women, children and adults, Christians and Muslims, Jews and Buddhists, Hindus and Catholics, Latinos and Caucasians, Asian and African Americans. However, I am concerned about reports of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim acts committed by some in our communities. American Muslims and Arab Americans share our commitment to the American ideals of freedom, justice, and democracy. . . Acts of discrimination only serve to divide our Nation and weaken our strength. Our Nation is made stronger when we embrace our diversity."

**Cari M. Dominguez, Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Urges Workplace Tolerance, September 14, 2001**

"In the midst of this tragedy, employers should take time to be alert to instances of harassment or intimidation against Arab-Americans and Muslim employees. Preventing and prohibiting injustices against our fellow workers is one way to fight back. . . against the evil forces that assaulted our workplaces Tuesday morning. . . Our laws reaffirm our national values of tolerance and civilized conduct. At this time of trial, these values will strengthen us as a common people . . . the nation's workplaces are fortified by the enduring ability of Americans of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and nationalities to work together harmoniously and productively."

**Paul Steven Miller, Commissioner, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, September 12, 2001**

"In light of the events this week, I recognize discrimination and harassment against Arab Americans and Moslems have become a much greater and more immediate threat today. I want you to know that I and the EEOC are committed to combating any illegal discrimination against Arab Americans and Moslems that occurs in the workplace."

**Robert A. Destro, Director, Interdisciplinary Program in Law & Religion, The Catholic University of America, September 12, 2001**

"As we turn to the task of identifying those who supported the perpetrators of this callous murder of our fellow citizens, we must remember that Justice, not vengeance, is the basis for global solidarity and domestic tranquility. We must not, however, permit our righteous anger to lead us to forget the lessons of the past. Targeting any person — citizen or visitor — on the basis of his or her religion, nationality, or culture is evil, and at the root of our present crisis. Islam is not the enemy. Neither are our fellow Americans who are of Arabic origin or adherents of Islam. We must join together in this time of tragedy."

**Union of American Hebrew Congregations, September 12, 2001**

"We are concerned, in particular, with reports that some in our nation have directed their understandable anger at Tuesday's carnage at individual Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. We are outraged at reports of attacks on Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and their mosques and businesses and condemn all such acts of lawlessness."

**Korean American Coalition, September 12, 2001**

"All of us remember the terrible mistakes we made as a country when thousands of innocent Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps during WWII in the hysteria following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Any attack on someone of perceived Arab ancestry is not only an attack on his or her civil rights, but also an attack on our country's sense of justice and equality."

**Asian American Journalists Association**, *September 12, 2001*

"Already, there is much concern within Arab American communities in our nation about the backlash that might result from Tuesday's attacks. We can help ensure that the devastating events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania do not lead to further injustices against other Americans." —

**AFL-CIO**, *September 12, 2001*

Even as we denounce this act, we must remember that this was an act of terrorists, not an Arab attack, and reject anti-Arab retaliation or discrimination. Now is the time to renew the values that bind us together as a nation.

**Seniors USA**, *September 15, 2001*

"Of more importance, in keeping with one of our most important cornerstones when our country was formed, we adhere to the principle to provide justice to all . . . In keeping with these beliefs, we must remember America's 7 million Muslims and 6 million Arab-Americans are Americans just as much as we are and are not to be viewed as a lesser American or any way different in our love for America."

**Leroy D. Baca, Sheriff, County of Los Angeles**, *September 13, 2001*

"Unfortunately, there are those who would use this calamity as an excuse to blame a particular race or those practicing a specific religion. As a result, there have already been hate crimes committed against the Arab-American and Muslim-American communities. . . The terrorists, who attacked our nation, did so to divide us and create a climate of fear. If we allow prejudice and hate to separate our multicultural country, the cowards who planned and implemented this horror will have succeeded. We cannot allow history to repeat itself and make the same mistakes that were made following Pearl Harbor against loyal Americans of Japanese descent. Our nation is facing a grave challenge to our way of life and it is time to unite, as we have done time and again throughout our history."

**Rod Paige, U. S. Secretary of Education**, *September 19, 2001*

"In response to last week's events specifically, I urge you to make sure that assemblies, classroom discussions, and other school activities held to honor victim of the tragedies, do not inadvertently foster the targeting of Arab-American students for harassment or blame. Encourage students to discuss diversity constructively and to express disagreement over ideas or beliefs in a respectful manner. . . Through our words and the example of our own conduct, we must remind our children that harassment of and violence toward any individual because of his or her race or national origin is never acceptable. In addition, we must emphasize during this difficult time in our nation's history that our feelings of anger and sadness must not be directed at innocent Arab Americans, or other individuals having no connection to last week's events. Working together, we can make sure that our children get a good education in a safe environment that does not tolerate violence and hatred."

**David Broder**, *The Washington Post*, *September 18, 2001*

"This struggle will test the temperament of the American people for a long time. But one thing needs to be done right now. I have been talking with my friend Jim Zogby, the president of the Arab American Institute, about the assaults and threats members of that community have experienced since September 11.

Vile words have been uttered on the street and on talk shows. Bullets and fist have flown. That cannot be condoned. The statements of condemnation from the Bush administration and the Senate have been strong. But they need to be echoed in local communities. It is not enough to remain silent. The bigots must be condemned, and gestures of support given to Arab American families. This too is part of our national character test."