



THE  
AMERICA  
I BELIEVE IN

2016 ACTION TOOLKIT

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



## WHY THIS TOOLKIT?



This collection of resources is intended to empower you to respond to the fear, hate, and bigotry you are witnessing in your community and across the country with a powerful alternative vision: The America you want to see, the America you believe in.

Media and public figures are constantly ratcheting up the rhetoric of crisis, exploiting the public's genuine need for security. They are trading on society's worst instincts of prejudice and fear in ways that could have disastrous consequences for human rights.

The evidence: A wave of anti-refugee rhetoric and actions across the country, harassment of American Muslims, and calls to respond to terrorism by committing war crimes.

This climate of fear and bigotry threatens to prime the public for increased repression both in and outside the United States, including human rights violations such as torture or war crimes such as “carpet bombing” civilians. This climate of hate and bigotry is threatening human rights at home and around the world.

That's where this toolkit comes in. This is a collection of resources for you to use right where you are to respond to fear-mongering and hateful rhetoric inside your community with a powerful alternative vision of what is possible. When comments are made in the media advocating for a return to torture, governors issue executive orders to block refugees, or businesses engage in anti-Muslim hate and discrimination, the actions in this toolkit can provide you with concrete ways to defend human rights.

### KEY GUIDANCE REGARDING AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Amnesty International is a non-partisan human rights organization that neither supports nor opposes any political party, candidate, government, or political ideology. Amnesty International does not seek to influence elections. Because Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) is classified as a “public charity” – 501(c)(3) – by the Internal Revenue Service, there are certain restrictions on the organization's actions in relation to elections and political activities.

As you engage with other organizations and the public, if you are doing so in Amnesty's name or as a representative of Amnesty, please remember not to make statements or sign on to statements that suggest we oppose or endorse a particular candidate. As an international human rights organization, we have an obligation to continue to educate the public during an elections season but we cannot intervene in an election. In your personal capacity, you are free to engage politically without restrictions.

# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

You can use this toolkit to take action in response to incidents in your community or in the media that are inconsistent with the America you believe in. Learn the facts (section 1); engage your circles (section 2); influence your community (section 3); and impact your elected officials (section 4).

## GETTING STARTED

Whether you are a student, parent or community member, you can start by sharing information with each other about what you are experiencing or witnessing – this is one of the best ways to stop feeling isolated, and start organizing. Engage your circles (neighbors, relatives, friends) in difficult conversations about the anti-Muslim hate that is at the root of many anti-human rights proposals on refugees and national security. Get the facts about the issues in “Reality Check” (section 1) and use the tools for “Engaging Your Circles” (section 2). Developing a strategy for how you’ll move forward.

Once you are ready to move beyond your circle or group’s internal discussion, and engage your community and elected officials, you can use Sections 3 and 4 of this toolkit. Call a meeting and discuss:

- What are the skills and particular interests of the people at the meeting?
- Who can you involve from other organizations or groups?
  - Are there other civic groups, neighborhood associations, religious or cultural groups that might share your concerns? (Section 2A).
  - For students, are there teachers/professors who could support you? (Section 2B).
  - At the end of your first meeting, can everyone agree to invite 1-2 additional contacts or friends to the next meeting?
- Can you use social media to reach out, create a group on Facebook or post about your future meetings?
- What’s a realistic timeline for your activities?

## START SMALL. THIS TOOLKIT HAS ACTIVITIES FOR 1-2 PEOPLE:

- Organize a tabling event or other space to engage people in your school or community in one-on-one conversations about anti-Muslim hate. Use the “engaging our circles” tips in this toolkit (Section 2).
- Ask people from different faith groups and activist communities to join you for a meeting. Discuss shared concerns and possible next steps to take together, utilizing the “Facilitating a Session” guide in this toolkit (Section 2).
- Write a letter to the editor for your school or local paper expressing your concerns, using the tips and sample letter in this toolkit (Section 4).
- Call your member of Congress and other elected officials (Section 4).
- Reach out to your local radio station and ask it to cover how anti-Muslim hate is affecting students or people like you.

## ACTIVITIES FOR 3-5 PEOPLE:

- Write a statement of solidarity for your group and ask other organizations in your community to adopt it, too. Feel free to use or adapt the model statement of solidarity in this toolkit (Section 3).
- Contact a local newspaper’s ombudsperson or editorial board and ask for a meeting to discuss anti-Muslim hate, surveillance and harassment in your community (Section 4).
- Organize a forum, open mic or town hall where people can come to talk about their experiences with surveillance, discrimination, and harassment.



# TIMELINE

Is your local group making plans to take action in the upcoming months to create the America we believe in? Here is a suggested timeline of events:

## JUNE-JULY:

- Meet with your local Amnesty group or other local organizations. Facilitate a “Creating the America We Believe In” session to brainstorm actions to take together.
- Begin to practice the “engaging your circles” tips in personal conversations with friends, family, and neighbors
- Start keeping an eye out in your local media for opportunities to submit a letter to the editor
- Start sharing the printable “The America I Believe In” posters over social media or in public places

## AUGUST-SEPTEMBER:

- Send a letter to your school/university expressing your concerns about anti-Muslim harassment and surveillance
- Call leaders in your community and your elected officials and ask them for public statements of solidarity

## OCTOBER-NOVEMBER:

- Organize statements of solidarity from your local organizations and places of worship
- Set up an editorial board meeting with a delegation of community leaders
- Continue to solicit solidarity statements from community leaders and elected officials
- Continue to use “The America I Believe In” posters in public spaces

## LET US KNOW

Please let us know when you take the actions in this toolkit. The numbers help us prove to policymakers and the general public that thousands of people support human rights – and reject hate and bigotry. Email [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org) to tell us about the actions you take. And if you have questions or would like more information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

**Together, we can build an America that leads through human rights.**



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## REALITY CHECK: ANTI-MUSLIM HATE

In many cities, private citizens are putting up anti-Muslim billboards, and elected officials are encouraging residents to fear their Muslim neighbors. Meanwhile, media and national public figures have called to ban Muslims or put them in internment.

These are symptoms of a deeper problem: **law-abiding Muslims are treated like a threat.**

### If you are less familiar with this issue, think about this:

- **Imagine if** your place of religious worship, or the way you dress, made you a target for police. That's a lived reality for some American Muslims.
  - For example, in 2013, we learned that in New York the police have designated entire mosques as "terrorist enterprises" to justify sweeping surveillance of worshippers, including taking pictures and videos of those leaving and entering. Imagine if it was your place of worship.
  - In March 2016, a police officer reportedly asked a woman outside a public library in Washington, D.C. to remove her headscarf and threatened her with arrest, pulling out handcuffs, when she refused. Imagine if it was any other religious garb – a yarmulke or cross necklace?
- **It's not just police**, it's vigilante-style surveillance. We are living in a culture that encourages citizens to report on each other – and thanks to media depictions and fear-mongering, many people think of American Muslims' ordinary behaviors as suspicious.
  - A high-profile example: In the last year, people have been pulled off planes for speaking on the phone in Arabic or due to vague suspicions based on their appearance.
  - In one case, four friends were reportedly pulled off a plane because the captain "felt uneasy and uncomfortable with their presence." When they asked if it was because they were dark-skinned and wore beards, an airline agent reportedly responded that their appearance "did not help."
- **Youth bear the brunt** – especially in bullying and harassment. For example, a 2014 survey of 621 Muslim students in California found that 55% of students reported being bullied based on their religious identity; this is twice as high as students reporting being bullied nationally. Of students wearing an Islamic headscarf, 27 percent reported being discriminated against by their teacher.
- **Anti-Muslim fear and hate may contribute to the risk of human rights violations.** Public figures stoke fear and hate to justify abusive policies. Over time, they get the public to accept as necessary what was once seen as shocking.
- **If it was any other religious group** that faced this kind of stigma, surveillance and harassment, many people would denounce it. But today, anti-Muslim discrimination is often considered acceptable—when really, it's just bigotry.



## REALITY CHECK: ANTI-MUSLIM HATE

Here are **ways to respond** to proposals like Muslim bans or internment (also check out Section II on personal conversations):

- By bashing Muslims, media and public figures are exploiting our legitimate need for safety to score points and ratings off our worst instincts of fear and prejudice. They are simply using Muslims as a scapegoat.
- We've seen this happen in history before, including against Jews, who faced years of anti-Semitism that ultimately led to the Holocaust.
- Most Americans – according to one study, 6 out of 10 – say they don't personally know any Muslims. It is no wonder many people are so fearful of Muslims: what they know simply comes from media, which is constantly associating Muslims with terrorism.
- In fact, American Muslims are your neighbors, doctors, teachers and customers. They are veterans, entrepreneurs and scientists. Muslims include celebrities like Amal Clooney and One Direction's Zayn Malik, and athletes like Shaquille O'Neal, Mohamed Sanu and Mohammed Wilkerson.
- American Muslims are a part of this country's history. As President Obama put it recently, "Muslim Americans helped to build our nation." New York's first Islamic Center was built in the 1890s.
- There are an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in the world and 3.3 million in the United States. Ascribing the actions of armed groups to this many people is illogical and unfair. Instead of blaming Muslims, we should stand in solidarity with Muslims who are themselves the victim of horrific attacks and abuses by armed groups such as the one calling itself the Islamic State, including refugees.
- To treat an entire community as suspect and deprive people of rights based on nonviolent beliefs is wrong and antithetical to human rights and the U.S. Constitution.
- The statistics don't back up the fear-mongering. The FBI has reported that 250 Americans have traveled or tried to travel overseas to join ISIS; even assuming all those identified were Muslims, that would be a minuscule .0083% of this country's estimated 3 million Muslims.
- To the contrary, according to one study, 2 out of every 5 disrupted terrorism attacks between 2001 and 2011 were based on information provided by Muslim community members.

For more information on countering anti-Muslim hate, please contact us at [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org)



## REALITY CHECK: REFUGEES

Many people in the U.S. are spreading a myth that Muslim refugees should be feared and rejected. **Don't buy into the fear-mongering. Here are the facts.**

We are in the midst of the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with more than 21.3 million refugees worldwide; **51% of all refugees are children, and currently 86% of all refugees are hosted by developing countries.** Hundreds of thousands of refugees are fleeing violence and persecution, yet public figures often scapegoat refugees and asylum seekers - particularly Muslim refugees – by responding with hate and fear instead of facts and human rights.

Instead of welcoming refugees, **30 governors have publicly spoken out against refugee resettlement;** 18 states have pushed legislation or executive orders to officially bar refugees; and 31 bills have been introduced in this Congress that seek to restrict the rights and/or resettlement of refugees in general or Muslim refugees in particular.

Here are **key facts** for you to know when encountering someone advocating for refugee restrictions or espousing anti-refugee rhetoric:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, states that everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- Refugees leave their homes because they have no other choice, and many are fleeing war and terror, including 4.7 million refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria, and 3 million refugees who have fled conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Many refugees are fleeing attacks from armed groups, violence, and terrorism. Those fleeing Syria, for example, are fleeing the Assad regime, the armed group calling itself Islamic State, and other armed groups.
- Refugees face incredible hardship. For example, more than 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the local poverty line. Currently, 86% of all refugees are hosted by developing countries.
- Only a small number of the total 19.5+ million refugees are designated for resettlement. The UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) has designated 1.15 million of the most vulnerable refugees as in need of immediate resettlement; these include: torture survivors, people with serious medical conditions and disabilities, unaccompanied children and children at risk, people persecuted for the sexuality or gender, and women at risk.
- The vetting process in the United States for refugees is already lengthy, extremely detailed, and very safe, and it takes roughly two years. Refugees are extremely well-vetted as part of the U.S. process of resettlement, and they will not be admitted until all security screenings have been successfully completed.
- While the United States has committed to taking in more refugees, the United States can and must do more and further increase the number of refugees it accepts annually and increase support for refugee efforts globally.
- According to the Migration Policy Institute, of the 784,000 refugees resettled in the United States in the 14 years following the 9/11 attacks, three resettled refugees have been arrested for planning terrorist activities; two of these were not planning an attack in the United States.

For more information about countering fear-mongering and anti-refugee rhetoric, visit [www.amnestyusa.org/refugee](http://www.amnestyusa.org/refugee) or contact Tarah Demant [tdemant@aiusa.org](mailto:tdemant@aiusa.org)



# REALITY CHECK: RESPONDING TO TERRORISM WITH WAR CRIMES & HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Think back to the last time something happened that made people afraid. Maybe it was the acts of terrorism in Paris or the mass shooting in San Bernardino. When these things happened, many public figures immediately proposed reacting in ways that threaten human rights from re-starting waterboarding and other forms of torture to carpet-bombing or indiscriminately targeting civilians in the Middle East. Here's a reality check: these are proposals to commit war crimes and other violations of international law.

We grieve for the victims and survivors of heinous attacks, and seek justice for these crimes. But our grief must not be distorted. Dehumanizing Muslims and people all over the world—**claiming that American lives are worth more, that only some people deserve dignity and rights is unacceptable.**

Here are **key facts** and arguments for you to know when encountering someone advocating for war crimes and other violations of international law.

- Proposals for carpet bombing are proposals for war crimes and other violations of international law. Intentionally targeting children and other non-combatants are war crimes.
- Torture is a crime under U.S. and international law, no exceptions. International treaties signed and ratified by the U.S., including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions, firmly prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and allow for no exceptions.
- Proposals to inflict torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment make a mockery of these international treaties the U.S. helped write and urges other nations to obey.
- The fact that armed groups have committed atrocities doesn't justify the U.S. committing war crimes. The answer to human rights abuses isn't to commit more human rights abuses.
- The standard we should hold this country to is human rights – not the actions of abusive armed groups we rightly condemn for torture and extrajudicial executions.
- It's not right to ask U.S. service members to commit atrocities so decision-makers in Washington, D.C. can bluster that they're "tough on terrorism."
- When the United States engages in torture and war crimes, it only promotes lawlessness, and ultimately it makes everyone less safe. It causes the United States to lose its credibility to urge other countries to follow international obligations and respect human rights. It undermines a system of global legal protections that over the long haul is our best hope for human rights.
- I don't want torture and other abuses committed in my name. The America that I believe in leads with human rights.

For more information about countering fear-mongering and calls for war crimes, email [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org).

# ENGAGING OUR OWN CIRCLES

Hateful rhetoric often occurs in private conversations or in the comments section of social media – with friends, family, and neighbors. You can make a difference starting by educating and pushing back against fear, hate, and bigotry in your own personal interactions.

Utilizing the talking points in this toolkit on welcoming refugees, rejecting anti-Muslim hate, and denouncing human rights violations and war crimes, you can make a difference in your circles by engaging those around you to counter fear, hate, and bigotry. Here are some guidelines for these tough conversations.



## 1. ASSESS THE SITUATION

- Are you able to safely engage with the problematic statement or behavior?
- Is this person willing to engage with you?
- Are you able to identify what the problematic statement or behavior is?
- Do you have the capacity and energy to address their problematic statement or behavior?
- Will engaging with this person foster meaningful interaction? If so, proceed to the next step.

## 2. ADDRESS THE STATEMENT OR BEHAVIOR

Calmly question the offending party around their statement. Make sure to only address the statement or behavior and not the person.

**USE:** “The statement that you made was offensive and outright bigotry.”

**DO NOT USE:** “You are hateful and ignorant.”

The former opens up space for conversation. The latter closes space, fosters resentment and corners the offending party.

Here are examples of questions to address problematic statements and/or behaviors

- “What you just said made me feel really uncomfortable, what did you mean when you said \_\_\_\_”
- “I don’t think I correctly understood what you meant, what does \_\_\_ mean?”
- “Can you help me understand what you meant to say when you said \_\_\_\_”
- “Can you explain your viewpoint to me?”

# ENGAGING OUR OWN CIRCLES

## BE READY FOR DEFENSIVENESS

When addressing oppressive statements or behaviors, the offending party will usually respond back in a defensive posture. Be ready to listen to them but at the same time hold them accountable for the impact of their actions.

### Here are some typical responses to being called out/in:

- “You’re being too sensitive.”
- “Why are you defending ‘those’ people?”
- “Are you a terrorist or something?”
- “You must hate America.”
- “Don’t try to censor my freedom of speech.”

Each of these responses are rooted in fear, ignorance and insecurity. You do not want to engage or escalate from that frame. Rather, continue to question more intently and to interrogate the underlying bigotry in their initial statement.

### Here are questions and statements that can help foster place of understanding with the offending party:

- “I am sensing defensiveness in your voice, where is that coming from?”
- “It’s clear that you have some very strong opinions, can you help me understand where and how these opinions are being formed?”
- “What you said was really offensive and hurtful, why do you feel that way?”
- “I know that you are not a hateful person, why do you insist on holding on to such hurtful statements?”

## BRIDGE THE INTERACTION TO ACTION

After having spent your time and energy engaging with this person you are going to want to make sure to conclude the conversation in a way that informs them clearly about the impact of their behavior and provide them with the opportunity to educate themselves. Here are two likely outcomes that you can prepare for:

### 1. Dismissal

In this situation, there is little to be gained in continuing the interaction. In these instances, you’ve planted a seed of inquiry and reflection that will hopefully cultivate into introspective remorse, guilt and finally openness to changing their behavior.

### 2. Acceptance

In this scenario, the offending party has either partially or fully apologized for their behavior and are open to changing it. This is an opportunity for you to provide them with resources to educate themselves, such as the “Reality Check” portion of this toolkit. It is important for you to shepherd this relationship and help them move away from guilt into becoming a true ally. This is not a process that happens overnight and it isn’t one that ever truly ends. But the most important thing to note is that it needs to start somewhere and it will start with you.

# ENGAGING OUR OWN CIRCLES: FACILITATING A SESSION

## “CREATING THE AMERICA WE BELIEVE IN”

This session is a way for your extracurricular club, place of worship, community group, or other organized space with your neighbors, to come together in a safe space to reflect on experiences of fear, hate, and bigotry and to strategize together on ways to educate the public and create an alternative vision based on human rights. It may be especially useful in the wake of an event that results in increased fear-mongering, such as an act of terror, a hateful comment from a public figure, or a disturbing local billboard or incident.

## SESSION LENGTH: 60 MINUTES



### Segment One: Identify the Problem (20 Minutes)

Facilitator introduces the session, informing participants that this is a guided session in accordance with Amnesty International USA’s “America I Believe In” campaign to respond to fear, hate, and bigotry with facts and education, particularly as it relates to anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, and pro-human rights violations or pro-war crime sentiments and statements.

- Participants introduce themselves.
- Facilitator reviews with the group at least one recent incident that has involved anti-Muslim, anti-refugee, or other hateful/fear-mongering rhetoric or activity. This could include comments in the media, a local act of hate or discrimination by a business, a nationally significant event, or dangerous legislation on the state or local level. Ask the group if there are other similar incidents that have alarmed them.
- Facilitator encourages the group to discuss the local impact of this incident. Guiding questions:
  - Were you previously aware of this incident?
  - What was your instant reaction?
  - Why do you think this is problematic?
  - Have you encountered others in this community who were supportive of this rhetoric?
  - What was your reaction to those comments in support of fear/hate/bigotry?
  - What does the group think could be the harm that results if this fear/hate/bigotry continues unchecked?
- Facilitator guides the group through a “reality check” of the incident. The group should read together the pertinent Reality Check section of this toolkit. For example, if the incident involved refugee-bashing, read through the refugees reality check. Allow participants to read it “popcorn style.” Ask the group to reflect on this “reality check.”
  - Based on this information, what did the fear or hate-based incident/statement get wrong?
  - How does the incident or statement differ from the America that you believe in?

# ENGAGING OUR OWN CIRCLES: FACILITATING A SESSION



## Segment Two: Identifying a Positive Alternative Vision (20 Minutes)

- Hand each participant a printable poster from this toolkit, ask them to fill it in with what the America they believe in would look like (give about 5 minutes for participants to think and write).
- For those who are comfortable sharing, each participant should show the group what the America they believe in would look like and explain why they wrote what they wrote.
- Facilitator should then ask, who in our community can and should exercise leadership to respond with facts to educate the public, and create the America we believe in? Facilitator should make a list during discussion. Possible answers could be: local businesses, local organizations, community leaders, places of worship, government officials, etc.



## Segment Three: Taking the Next Step Forward (20 Minutes)

- Facilitator should review some or all of the ideas discussed: The participants' visions of the America they believe in, and the suggestions for who should be exerting leadership to achieve that vision.
- Facilitator can then review action items in the toolkit, and the group should jointly decide how to move forward together. This may involve soliciting statements of solidarity from community leaders, elected officials or local businesses, jointly requesting a meeting with the local editorial board, planning a demonstration to educate the public and raise awareness, or any other action item provided for or inspired by the toolkit.
- If possible, the group should take action together at the session, or schedule when they will take action.

**Don't forget: Contact us if you host an "America I Believe In" session! Email [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org)**



Also: be sure to use the posters you just created together. You could **take a group picture with the posters and put it on social media**, or put them in a public place like a bulletin board together. Even these small actions are opportunities for advocacy.

And don't forget to use the hashtag **#AmericaIBelieveIn**

# THE AMERICA I BELIEVE IN

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# ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

This section of the toolkit provides guidance on how to build awareness among your school and community. We can reject hate and reclaim our communities by showing solidarity and demanding that the human rights of all people be respected.

## TAKING ACTION: STATEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY

You can encourage your organization or place of worship to issue a statement of solidarity. You can use the entire model statement, or relevant portions of it and you can also add information about particular incidents or events (e.g. a new anti-Muslim or anti-refugee billboard going up in your town). Once you have a statement of solidarity, here's what you can do:

- Approach other organizations to sign your statement or do their own.
- Choose a date to 'go public' with the statement/s.
- Send it along with a cover note to your local newspapers and magazines, radio and television stations.
- Send it along with a cover note to your mayor, the chief of police, your state senator and representative and your Members of Congress. You can find the addresses online.
- In your cover note, be sure to provide your contact information, list the organization/s that signed the statement, and make an offer or request to meet further to discuss your concerns.
- Send AIUSA the statement and let us know how we can support you. Email us at [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org) with the subject line "Solidarity Statement."





# MODEL STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

We the undersigned/[name of group] believe that providing safety and security for our country and our community should not mean sacrificing human rights. Prejudice, bigotry and fear-mongering do not make us safer. In responding to the risk of terrorism, our country and our community should be guided by a sense of fairness and our long-standing commitment to equality and human rights. We should not scapegoat anyone – whether they are refugees or Muslims. We urge our all in our community to reject the rhetoric of hate and support human rights at home.

## WELCOMING REFUGEES

We are alarmed by the rhetoric of bigotry, hate and misinformation we have seen in response to the world's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Building walls to keep people out or trying to ban specific religious groups will only increase the suffering of those who are among the world's most vulnerable people. People who are fleeing persecution and terrible violence deserve our support and protection – not our scorn. We should not turn our backs on those seeking sanctuary at our shores. We must stand between the torturer and the tortured, the human rights abuser and the survivor. In the name of our safety, we should not sacrifice our sense of shared humanity – or our compassion.

We urge city officials to declare their support for refugee resettlement and reject anti-refugee legislation based on prejudice, not our safety.

## SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBORS

We are also disturbed by the vicious anti-Muslim rhetoric. Muslims are our neighbors, doctors, teachers, customers and friends. It is unfair and illogical to ascribe the actions of armed groups or any particular individual to this country's 3.3 million Muslims. We reject the scapegoating and villainizing of American Muslims. To treat an entire community as suspect and deprive people of rights based on nonviolent beliefs is wrong and antithetical to human rights and the U.S. Constitution.

We call on all [city/town] officials to take steps to protect the human rights of people in our community, including the rights to freedom of religion and non-discrimination. The police should pledge to support our Muslim neighbors in a time of rising Islamophobia and reported hate crimes. The police should not keep people or places of worship under surveillance on the basis of prejudice against Muslims.

Our schools must be a safe place for every child to learn and flourish – whether they are a refugee, a Muslim or anyone else. No parent should have to worry that their child will face bullying or harassment because of who they are. We urge all officials responsible for our schools to send a clear signal that discrimination or harassment in schools against students based on their actual or perceived religion, race or national origin is wrong.

## DENOUNCING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND/OR WAR CRIMES

We are alarmed by recent discussions in the media about war crimes. Human rights exist even in times of war, and giving up on our values does not make us safer. Suggestions of torturing suspects or carpet-bombing civilians are calls to commit human rights violations and war crimes, and must be condemned by our community. When the United States violates human rights, it loses credibility to urge other nations to respect those same rights. We call upon all of our public officials, including [mayor, Members of Congress, governor, etc.] to publicly denounce human rights violations and war crimes.

Our values and our traditions of equality and freedom should guide our response to terrorism and conflict around the world. The America we believe in leads through human rights.

# ENGAGING YOUR SCHOOLS

## TAKING ACTION: INFLUENCE YOUR SCHOOL

Students sometimes bear the brunt of anti-Muslim hate. Discrimination by teachers and school officials, peer harassment and bullying, and surveillance are just some of what students are facing. You can organize parents, students and other members of your community to sign a letter to your local school board, superintendent, principal or other education official about anti-Muslim and anti-refugee bigotry. You can use the entire model letter, or relevant portions of it, and you can also add information about particular recent incidents or events (e.g. reports you have gathered about students harassed in the school district). Once you have a letter with 15 or more signers, here's what you can do:

- Approach other organizations to see if their members will sign on.
- Choose a date to 'go public' with the letter.
- Send the letter along with a cover note to your local newspapers and magazines, radio and television stations.
- Send it along with a cover note to your mayor, the chief of police, your state senator and representative and your members of Congress. You can find their addresses online.
- In your cover note, be sure to provide your contact information and make an offer or request to meet further to discuss your concerns.
- Send AIUSA the statement and let us know how we can support you. Email us at [security@aiusa.org](mailto:security@aiusa.org) with the subject line "Letter to Schools."





# MODEL LETTER TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Dear Superintendent/School Administrator,

As concerned students, parents and community members, we write to urge you to take actions in support of students who face the risk of increased harassment, discrimination and ethnic and religious profiling in the current climate of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee bigotry. We also seek a meeting to discuss our concerns.

Our schools must be a safe place for every child to learn and flourish – whether they are a refugee, a Muslim or anyone else. No parent should have to worry that their child will face bullying or harassment because of who they are. No child should fear that their teachers will treat them differently due to their religious or ethnic identity.

We urge all officials responsible for our schools to send a clear signal that discrimination or harassment in schools against students based on their actual or perceived religion, race or national origin is wrong. In a December 2015 letter, the U.S. Secretary of Education outlined steps that all educators can take to create a safe learning environment in the face of rising anti-Muslim and anti-refugee bigotry. We request that you provide us information on the steps you have taken in response to the 2015 letter.

We are also concerned about profiling and surveillance of students based on their ethnicity, national origin or religion. Our schools should not be places of fear and self-censorship, where students must fear being singled out for special monitoring based on who they are or how they dress. They should not have to fear being reported to law enforcement for engaging in lawful and ordinary behavior that is vaguely defined as suspicious. This kind of surveillance in our schools subjects our youth to the prejudice and bias that educators may have, especially in light of the national climate of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee bigotry. As a starting point, we urge you to provide us information about the school district's participation in any monitoring or surveillance programs run by federal, state or local authorities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you and working together to strengthen human rights protections for all students.

Sincerely,

  

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# IMPACTING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Public figures on a local, state, or national level have an important platform they can use to push back against hateful rhetoric and fear-mongering. Elected officials on a state, local, and national level should be responding to **denounce human rights violations and war crimes, reject anti-Muslim hate, and welcome refugees.**

Your mayor, city council, governor, state legislators, and members of Congress should hear from you when anti-human rights rhetoric spreads in your community and across the country. You can use the key facts in the Reality Checks section and the tips in this section to urge those who are elected to represent you to speak out against refugee bashing, anti-Muslim hate, and war crimes.

## TAKE ACTION:

Ask your elected officials to issue a public statement denouncing fear, hate, and bigotry.

Make a phone call to the offices of your elected officials, and ask them for a statement of solidarity.

Here is a sample script to use when calling:

## INTRODUCE YOURSELF:

“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_(name) and I live in \_\_\_\_\_ (city, state). I am troubled by the fear, hate, and bigotry that I see growing in my community and across the country and I’m calling to ask \_\_\_\_\_ (official’s name) to issue a statement rejecting such fear-mongering and supporting human rights.”

The America I believe in would \_\_\_\_\_ (welcome refugees/reject torture/denounce anti-Muslim hate). I think \_\_\_\_\_(official’s name) has the responsibility to speak out against hate and fear-mongering.

## MAKE THE ASK:

I want to ask that \_\_\_\_\_(official’s name) make a public statement denouncing this kind of rhetoric. He/she has a responsibility as a public official to use his/her platform to counter this wave of fear and hate.”

## PROMISE TO FOLLOW-UP:

“If it would be helpful, I can send you a model statement of solidarity or examples of statements from local organizations and leaders in my community. I’ll follow up in a week or two about the possibility of \_\_\_\_\_(official’s name) issuing such a statement. Thank you for your time and I look forward to discussing this further.”

To get in touch with your local Legislative Coordinator to schedule a meeting with your elected representatives, please contact [grassroots@aiusa.org](mailto:grassroots@aiusa.org)



## REACHING OUT TO LOCAL MEDIA

Another great way to speak out publicly against fear, hate, and bigotry, and to encourage others to do the same, is to engage with the local media. Widely-read publications in your city or state offer venues for readers to comment publicly and express their opinions. A letter to the editor is a great way for you to exercise this option on your own. Be sure to specifically mention your elected officials by name, and call upon them to oppose anti-human rights legislative proposals.

If you have a larger group of individuals who are concerned about an incident and want to push back, consider reaching out to the editorial board of your local newspaper to ask for a meeting. By meeting with the editorial board with a delegation of community leaders, you can request that they publish an editorial responding to incidents of fear, hate, and bigotry.

### **Here are some important things to keep in mind when writing letters-to-the-editor:**

- Submit your letter early, preferably the same day as the article to which you are responding.
- Know your paper's rules for letters. Adhere to their word limit; if you send them a letter that's too long, you can't expect them to take the time to edit it down to the proper length.
- Your letter should not just express agreement or disagreement with the thrust of the article, but should add new information or insight that contributes to ongoing discussion of the topic.
- It's best not to identify yourself as being affiliated with Amnesty International in order to avoid any confusion about whether you are officially speaking for the organization.

A good letter to the editor will:

- Immediately reference the article to which it is responding
- Express agreement or disagreement
- Add new information
- Make a call for action

### **Sample letter to the editor:**

"I am appalled by \_\_\_\_\_ (incident). Fear, hate, and bigotry should have no place in our public discourse. The America I believe in would lead through human rights by (welcoming refugees/denouncing torture/rejecting anti-Muslim hate/etc.) Those with leading voices in our community, and the editorial board of this newspaper, should exercise their platform of influence to publicly and firmly push back against this kind of hateful rhetoric and fear-mongering."

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

### AMERICA I BELIEVE IN:

[www.amnestyusa.org/ibelieve](http://www.amnestyusa.org/ibelieve)

### REFUGEE TOOLKIT:

[www.amnestyusa.org/refugeetoolkit](http://www.amnestyusa.org/refugeetoolkit)

### AMERICAN TORTURE STORY TOOLKIT:

[www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/AmericanTortureStoryToolkitFall2015.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/AmericanTortureStoryToolkitFall2015.pdf)

### SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM:

[www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/security-with-human-rights](http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/security-with-human-rights)

### AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA'S ELECTION TOOLKIT:

[www.amnestyusa.org/aiusaelectionstoolkit](http://www.amnestyusa.org/aiusaelectionstoolkit)

### #UNFOLLOWME TOOLKIT: RESISTING UNLAWFUL SURVEILLANCE:

[www.amnestyusa.org/unfollowme](http://www.amnestyusa.org/unfollowme)

## ANTI-MUSLIM HATE: RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

### PROTECTING OUR MUSLIM YOUTH FROM BULLYING: THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

[www.stopbullying.gov/blog/2016/02/09/protecting-our-muslim-youth](http://www.stopbullying.gov/blog/2016/02/09/protecting-our-muslim-youth)

### ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE, LESSON PLANS: ANTI-MUSLIM BIGOTRY AND BEING AN ALLY

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/anti-muslim-bigotry-and-being-an-ally.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/anti-muslim-bigotry-and-being-an-ally.html)

### TERROR ATTACK IN PARIS AND SCAPEGOATING:

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/terrorist-attack-in-paris-and-scapegoating.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/terrorist-attack-in-paris-and-scapegoating.html)





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