

September 29, 2015

Reince Priebus
Chairman, Republican National Committee
310 First Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Chair, Democratic National Committee
403 South Capitol Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Chairman Priebus and Representative Wasserman Schultz,

We, the undersigned civil rights, interfaith, community, and advocacy groups, have come together to express our deep concern regarding the divisive rhetoric being used by some presidential candidates as they campaign for America's highest public office.

Every four years, American democracy plays out on a grand scale when people from all walks of life come together to elect our next president. Many candidates—recognizing that we are stronger together—inspire Americans to join together to move our nation forward.

Sadly, on occasion, there are those who seek to divide us. The ugly, anti-Muslim rhetoric that we heard in the last week from several candidates for president is just the latest manifestation of this.

In just the last few days one candidate has suggested that he would be looking at getting rid of Muslims, while another has said that a Muslim should never be President of the United States and that Islam is incompatible with the Constitution. These ideas contradict the very essence of America—that a group of people from all walks of life, diverse in every imaginable way can form a lasting bond based on the shared belief in the principles of liberty, freedom, and justice.

This rhetoric is not just ugly, but it is also dangerous, for our country's future as it almost always is followed by an uptick in hate crimes and violence. We also see these statements as a harbinger of what may be; increasing attacks on communities based on faith, ethnicity, or race in order to achieve political gain.

Unfortunately, we have seen this before. In 2008, when a rumor campaign suggested that then-Sen. Barack Obama was Muslim, people of good conscience stood up—including candidate Sen. John McCain and former Secretary of State Colin Powell. In fact, Secretary Powell poignantly asked, "Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country?" Answering his own question, he said, "The answer is 'No.' That's not America."

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As Americans, we want candidates for public office to inspire us with their ideas—to bring us together to address the challenges facing our nation. It is time for candidates for public office to make a commitment to being leaders for all Americans. No American child should ever feel like he or she cannot aspire to be the president simply because of his or her faith.

We thank the members of each party who have spoken out, but more needs to be done. We ask you to categorically reject this type of bigotry and state on the record that it is incompatible with this country's founding principles. Further, we ask you to speak out publicly against those in your parties who promote anti-Muslim bigotry or any other rhetoric that seeks to divide Americans based on how we look or how we pray.

We look forward to your response and hope you will join us in making a commitment to bring America together. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully,

ACLU

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

American Baptist Churches USA

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Arab American Institute (AAI)

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote

Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Center for New Community

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness

Church World Service

ColorOfChange

DRUM – Desis Rising Up & Moving

Faith in Public Life

Foundation for Ethnic Understanding

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

Human Rights Campaign

Interfaith Alliance

Islamic Networks Group

Lambda Legal

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

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Muslim Advocates

Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)

Muslim Public Affairs Council

NAACP

National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Disability Rights Network

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

National Sikh Campaign

New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good

OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America

OneAmerica

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Interfaith Center of New York

The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

The Sikh Coalition

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ