

August 23, 2017

Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin  
1737 Main Street  
Columbia, SC 29201  
skbenjamin@columbiasc.net

Dear Mayor Benjamin,

We the undersigned national and local civil rights, faith-based, human rights, and community organizations, write to ask you to join us in publicly embracing our nation's core values of pluralism and religious freedom for all while firmly rejecting the forces of hate and bigotry that seek to divide us.

As you may be aware, ACT for America, the nation's largest anti-Muslim hate group, called for a protest in Columbia as part of a coordinated series of protests in over 60 cities on September 9th. Timed near the anniversary of the September 11th attacks, ACT branded these events as "America First" rallies to explicitly target Muslims at a time when hatred and bigotry have swept the nation. ACT announced this week that it is canceling the rallies for September. This suggests that ACT fears backlash in the likely event white supremacists participate in the rallies and threaten or perpetrate violence.

ACT's support for bigotry is overt, and it has a documented history of attracting white nationalist support. ACT's founder, Brigitte Gabriel, regularly vilifies Muslims, claiming that practicing Muslims cannot be loyal to the United States. She also once said that "every practicing Muslim is a radical Muslim" and that Muslims are a "natural threat to civilized people of the world, particularly Western society." Both she and ACT have had a long history of promoting policies at the federal and state levels intended to manufacture fear of Muslims.

ACT held similar rallies on June 10th of this year that not only attracted anti-Muslim activists, but also a host of armed militia-type groups and white nationalists. At least two of ACT's scheduled protests for September 9th featured organizers who openly embraced white nationalism.

As the country recently witnessed in Charlottesville, Virginia, rallies organized to promote bigotry similar to events planned for September 9th can lead to states of emergency, physical violence and even murder. The horrific events in Charlottesville occurred despite a prepared response from state and local officials and law enforcement.

Although ACT has removed its endorsement and branding from any rallies that may take place, many of the rallies have already been organized, and may continue with or without ACT's brand attached. In light of this possibility, and recent events, we urge you to

unequivocally condemn white supremacist and anti-Muslim hatred and make it clear that bigotry and violence are not welcome in Columbia.

We are deeply concerned about the type of message that anti-Muslim protests send to the American public and to the good people in your city--that it is acceptable to vilify people simply because of their faith.

Between 2014 and 2015, FBI data indicates that hate crimes against Muslims increased by 67%. Bias-motivated violence continues to target Muslims, Sikhs, Arabs, South Asians, and a number of other communities. Just this year alone there have been numerous murders of individuals who are Muslim or were targeted based on anti-Muslim bigotry, regardless of their religion. In addition, several mosques around the country have been targeted by arson. Incidents like these do not occur in a vacuum; anti-Muslim bigotry and violence is being fueled by hateful rhetoric and discriminatory policies at the highest level of government. The current atmosphere has also contributed to an environment in which children are the target of anti-Muslim sentiment, sometimes rising to the level of discrimination, intimidation, and harassment, impacting their right to attend school without fear.

Now, more than ever, we must come together and support one another from viewpoints and groups that seek to divide us.

Please do not stay silent in the face of bigotry and hate. As Americans take cues from their elected representatives, you are in a powerful position as a leader in your city to reject hatred and bigotry inspired by ACT.

We urge you to issue a statement to send a strong message that every person is welcome in your city and has the right to feel secure regardless of how they worship, where they're from, or who they love. Furthermore, we ask that you acknowledge that American Muslims have been an essential part of the fabric of our society since before our nation was founded. The members of your community, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, must be reassured that bigotry, hatred, and prejudice against any individual or group based on their faith, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, or disability status will not be tolerated.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope that we can work closely with you in the future to positively engage all communities.

Please contact Madihha Ahussain with Muslim Advocates at [madihha@muslimadvocates.org](mailto:madihha@muslimadvocates.org) or Lindsay Schubiner with Center for New Community at [lindsay@newcomm.org](mailto:lindsay@newcomm.org) with any questions or to discuss this further.

Thank you in advance for your partnership and principled leadership.

Sincerely,

#Get Organized Brooklyn (#GOBK)

18MillionRising.org

Advocates for Youth

African American Ministers In Action

Alianza Americas

Alliance of South Asians Taking Action

American Federation of Teachers

American Friends Service Committee

American Friends Service Committee - AZ

American Muslim Advisory Council (AMAC)

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Amnesty International USA

Arab American Institute

Arkansas United Community Coalition

Arts & Democracy

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Center for American Progress Action Fund

Center for Media Justice

Center for New Community

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Church World Service

Colorado Muslim Speakers Bureau

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Council on American-Islamic Relations

Countryside Community Church, UCC, Omaha NE

Courage Campaign

CREDO

Daya Inc.  
Defending Rights & Dissent  
Dignity/Houston  
Dignity/New York  
DignityUSA  
Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries  
Emgage Foundation  
End Rape on Campus  
Equal Justice Center  
Equal Justice Society  
Equal Rights Advocates  
Feminist Majority  
Franciscan Action Network  
FREE! Families Rally for Emancipation and Empowerment  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Frogtown community radio  
Genders and Sexualities Alliance Network  
Generation Justice  
Generation Progress  
Global Progressive Hub  
Granite State Progress  
Hollaback!  
Hollaback! Seattle  
Hope Community  
Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
Interfaith Alliance  
Interfaith Worker Justice  
Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness/Advocacy Network  
Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City (ISGKC)  
Islamic Networks Group (ING)  
Islamic Society of North America

Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks  
Jobs With Justice  
KRSM Radio  
Lambda Legal  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
MALDEF  
Matthew Shepard Foundation  
May First/People Link  
Media Alliance  
Mi Familia Vota  
Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue  
MoveOn.org  
MPower Change  
Multifaith Voices for Peace & Justice  
Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)  
Muslim Advocates  
Muslim Community Network  
Muslim Justice League  
Muslim Public Affairs Council  
NAACP  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Black Justice Coalition  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs  
National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC)  
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)  
National Council of Churches USA  
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

National Council of Jewish Women Chicago North Shore  
National Council of Jewish Women South Cook Section, Illinois  
National Council of Jewish Women, CO. Section  
National Council of Jewish Women, Los Angeles Section  
National Council of Jewish Women, Louisville Section  
National Council of Jewish Women, Seattle Section  
National Disaster Interfaith Network (NDIN)  
National Fair Housing Alliance  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Iranian American Council  
National Justice for Our Neighbors  
National Lawyers Guild - DC Chapter  
National LGBTQ Task Force  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good  
NJ Islamic Networks Group  
North Carolina Asian Americans Together  
NY Day of Remembrance Committee  
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans  
PolicyLink  
Poligon Education Fund  
Progress Florida  
Progress Michigan  
Progress South Carolina  
Progress Texas  
ProgressNow  
ProgressOhio  
Race Forward  
Reform Ohio  
Rockdale Temple  
SALAM Center

San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium  
Shoulder to Shoulder  
Sierra Club Rincon Group  
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)  
Somos Un Pueblo Unido  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
South Asian Bar Association of North America  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
SouthWest Organizing Project  
Southwest Workers Union  
Spokane Interfaith Council  
St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN)  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Temple Shalom, Cincinnati  
The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ  
The Greenlining Institute  
The Interfaith Center of New York  
The Islamic Center at NYU  
The Sikh Coalition  
Turning Point for Women and Families  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Church of Evanston  
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
UNITE HERE  
UU College of Social Justice  
Veterans for American Ideals  
Voices for Racial Justice  
Voting Rights Forward  
We Belong Together  
Win Without War  
WITNESS

World Without Genocide

Yemen Peace Project

YWCA Greater Austin

YWCA USA