



6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 506  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Phone: 301.270.1855  
Fax: 301.270.1882  
saalt@saalt.org  
www.saalt.org

## Join SAALT in Denouncing the Rise in Islamophobic Rhetoric

[South Asian Americans Leading Together](#) (SAALT), a national nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations, joins allies in Muslim and Arab communities as well as civil rights and faith-based organizations to raise serious concerns with the rhetoric and stances opposing the Park51 Community Center and Muslim places of worship around the country. The rise in racist, anti-Muslim and xenophobic statements is reprehensible and has no place in the national discourse. Park51 has been called everything from “inappropriate and insensitive” to a “Martyr-Marker honoring terrorists.” Muslims, like all Americans, enjoy the constitutionally protected right to freely worship in their communities. To call that right into question fundamentally undercuts the First Amendment.

Throughout our country's history, racial, ethnic and religious minorities have faced numerous barriers to full participation in American civic life. Examples including discriminatory Jim Crow laws, anti-Catholic riots targeting Irish-Americans and the shameful internment of Japanese Americans during World War II show that succumbing to racial and xenophobic stereotypes has harmed a broad cross-section of the American population.

The combined effect of anti-Muslim rhetoric used and reproduced by politicians and media outlets has already manifested. The list of attacks targeting Muslim Americans is growing at an alarming rate. August 25th saw the [desecration of the Iman Mosque](#) in Queens by a man shouting slurs including "terrorist" and urinating on prayer rugs during evening prayers.\* On August 24th, Ahmed Sharif, a Bangladeshi-American cab driver who has lived in the United States for 25 years, was [brutally and repeatedly stabbed](#) by a passenger who asked if he was Muslim. On August 20th, individuals [threw a brick into a California mosque](#) with a note saying, "No temple for the God of terrorism at Ground Zero." Violent hate crimes such as these show that the exploitative use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric quickly leads to tragedy. We must stand true to the values of the First Amendment and affirm Park51's claim to build in lower Manhattan, as well as for Muslim [places of worship](#) in Tennessee, California, Wisconsin and around the country. The time has come to take a stand against Islamophobia and defend the values that truly define this country.

Elected officials and candidates for public office, in particular, have significant influence in shaping political discourse. When they use language scapegoating members of certain groups, their actions can have far-reaching implications regarding how that community is viewed by the public and treated by the government. We urge politicians and candidates to affirm the core American values of inclusion, equality, and freedom and thank those that have stepped up to defend these institutions. As for those in opposition to Park51 or Muslim places of worship, we urge them to apologize for and retract statements diminishing the rights of Muslims.

[TAKE ACTION: Contact your legislators to demand accountability for anti-Muslim rhetoric](#)

Media outlets also play a crucial role in maintaining a civil and free public discourse by providing accurate, responsible coverage of current events. Media personalities and networks have a duty to present the different viewpoints in the debate around Park51 or places of worship in a manner that does not target Muslims or uncritically reproduce inflammatory speech. Simply [repeating](#) or [echoing](#) the troubling statements made by opponents in reference to Park51 or Muslim places of worship fuels xenophobic sentiment and hampers our nation's ability to have a meaningful dialogue about issues of race, religion and freedom.

[TAKE ACTION: Contact the major news networks to demand responsible and accurate coverage](#)

If your organization would like to support this statement, please email [info@saalt.org](mailto:info@saalt.org) with the organization's name and contact information.

To explore resources and tools related to hate crimes and xenophobia in the South Asian community, click [here](#).

If you feel you or others you know have been targeted based on your religion, ethnicity or national origin, email SAALT at [info@saalt.org](mailto:info@saalt.org).

\*Details that emerged after this statement was issued now indicate that this incident was not a hate crime.



6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 506  
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Phone: 301.270.1855  
Fax: 301.270.1882  
saalt@saalt.org  
www.saalt.org

This statement is supported by:

Adhikaar for Human Rights- [www.adhikaar.org](http://www.adhikaar.org)  
Asian Broadcasting Network- [www.abnchicago.org](http://www.abnchicago.org)  
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO- [www.apalanet.org](http://www.apalanet.org)  
Chhaya CDC- [www.chhayacdc.org](http://www.chhayacdc.org)  
Counselors Helping (South) Asians/Indians (CHAI)- [www.chaicounselors.org](http://www.chaicounselors.org)  
Daya- [www.dayahouston.org](http://www.dayahouston.org)  
Defending Dissent- [www.defendingdissent.org](http://www.defendingdissent.org)  
Florida Coastal School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic  
Human Values for Transformative Action- <http://hvta.squarespace.com>  
Japanese American Citizens League- [www.jacl.org](http://www.jacl.org)  
Manavi- [www.manavi.org](http://www.manavi.org)  
Muslim Public Affairs Council- [www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org)  
North American South Asian Bar Association- [www.nasaba.com](http://www.nasaba.com)  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum- [www.napawf.org](http://www.napawf.org)  
Narika- [www.narika.org](http://www.narika.org)  
OCA- [www.ocanational.org](http://www.ocanational.org)  
OneAmerica- [www.weareamerica.org](http://www.weareamerica.org)  
Open DC- [www.openwashingtondc.org](http://www.openwashingtondc.org)  
Raksha- [www.raksha.org](http://www.raksha.org)  
South Asian Progressive Action Coalition- [www.sapac.org](http://www.sapac.org)  
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund- [www.saldef.org](http://www.saldef.org)  
Sikh Coalition- [www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)  
Urban Justice Center- [www.urbanjustice.org](http://www.urbanjustice.org)