



Confronting Discriminatory Backlash after Paris and San Bernardino



To confront the recent backlash against Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Americans following the deeply tragic events in Paris and San Bernardino, officials at the Department of Justice – and across the Federal government – have spoken out loudly and unequivocally against discrimination, violence, and harassment targeting people because of what they look like, which country they come from, or where they worship.

- In recent months, a Connecticut man pleaded guilty to [firing a high-powered rifle at a mosque](#); a [Florida man pleaded guilty](#) to threatening to firebomb two mosques and shoot their congregants; and a former Missouri man pleaded guilty to violating the civil rights of others by [leading a conspiracy to deface a local Islamic Center with graffiti and burn two copies of the Qur'an](#).
- We announced the launch of “Combating Religious Discrimination Today,” [a new interagency community engagement initiative](#) designed to promote religious freedom, challenge religious discrimination, and enhance enforcement of religion-based hate crimes.
- [In a recent speech at the Islamic Society of Baltimore](#), President Obama reminded the American people that, “We can’t be bystanders to bigotry. And together, we’ve got to show that America truly protects all faiths.”
- Vanita Gupta, head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, [spoke at a roundtable discussion](#) in Newark, New Jersey, about our efforts to combat religious discrimination. She highlighted how, “Throughout the world, America shines as a beacon of freedom and opportunity. We welcome people from every creed and walk of life to our shores. And we believe in a set of simple truths. Tolerance can overcome bigotry. Empathy can extinguish hate. And diversity can defeat discrimination.”
- In a joint [op-ed in the New Jersey Star Ledger](#), Vanita Gupta and Paul J. Fishman, U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey, wrote that, “Following heinous acts of terrorism in particular, too many Muslim Americans – and those communities perceived as Muslim – suffer a backlash of violence and discrimination. This discriminatory backlash not only threatens the millions of Muslims in the United States who peacefully practice their religion; it threatens the very ideals that built the foundation of our democracy.”
- The Civil Rights Division participated in a [webinar sponsored by FEMA](#) to help prepare houses of worship for emergencies by reviewing available resources. More than 1,900 clergy and religious community leaders watched the webinar.
- John Walsh, U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado, affirmed in a [Denver Post op-ed](#) that even as the Justice Department’s top priority is “to protect our people and our national security,” we must also ensure, “that our legitimate fears do not cause us to react against an entire group of law-abiding people: the members of our Muslim-American communities.”
- John R. Parker, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas, [wrote an op-ed in the Dallas Morning News](#), acknowledging how “recent and horrific terror attacks around the world have resulted in a regrettable and divisive rhetoric, and unlawful conduct in some corners, throwing millions of law-abiding and patriotic Arab and Muslim Americans, as well as others perceived to be Muslim, into the frightening reality of feeling unsafe and threatened right here in the communities we share.”
- Echoing the sentiments of his colleagues, Barry Grissom, U.S. Attorney for the District of Kansas, [issued a statement that emphasized our shared commitment to reject discrimination](#): “Just as it is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideals that lead to radicalization, it is the responsibility of all Americans of every faith to reject discrimination.” He highlighted that, “as Americans we must not let fear drive us to hateful and divisive acts toward Muslims in this country.”
- [In a Dear Colleague Letter to educational leaders](#), Secretary of Education Arne Duncan wrote, “We cannot permit discrimination or harassment in schools against students based on their actual or perceived race, religion, or national origin. Moreover, because parents and students look to you for leadership, their hearing from you that such conduct is unconditionally wrong and will not be tolerated in our schools will make a real difference.”
- To combat discrimination in the workplace, Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Jenny R. Yang [issued a statement, along with instructive resource documents, to highlight this unequivocal message](#): “We urge all employees to re-affirm these values of tolerance and equality in their interactions with their co-workers and show that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated in America’s workplaces.”