



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Honorable Peter King
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman King:

We are writing to express our alarm at the recent news that Mr. Walid Phares will be a witness at one of your upcoming hearings. This was reported in an article¹ by the *National Review*, which is posted on the House Homeland Security Committee's website.

Mr. Phares's prior position in and association with organizations and militia groups known for carrying out massacres and systematic torture raise reasonable concerns regarding his relevance to any sober and objective hearing.

Mr. Phares is a "former official with the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia."² This militia was implicated, by Israel's official Kahan inquiry and other sources, in the 1982 massacre of civilian men, women and children at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. Regarding the massacre, the French news agency Agence France Presse (AFP) reported that, "Lebanese militias, notably the Lebanese Forces, went on a killing spree."³

In 1999, Phares' World Lebanese Organization included among its "leading members" both "Col. Sharbel Baraket, former deputy commander of the [South Lebanese Army], and Etienne Sakr, head of the radical Guardians of the Cedars group."⁴

Until its closure in 1999, the South Lebanese Army (SLA) controlled the notorious Khiam Prison. Human Rights Watch has stated, "It is indisputable that systematic torture occurred in Khiam."⁵ The SLA also perpetrated atrocities such as the 1984 massacre in which its members "fired guns and hurled hand grenades at men rounded up for questioning."⁶

Similarly, Sakr's group earned "a reputation for atrocities"⁷ during the Lebanese civil war. Responding to questions about his group's role in the Sabra and Shatila massacres, Sakr said, "We have the full right to deal with our enemies in Lebanon in the manner we find suitable."⁸

¹ Costa, Robert. "King's Speech: Rep. Peter King battles Islamic Radicalism and Political Correctness," *National Review*, February 15, 2011.

² Beiser, Vince. "New Bedfellows Unite Against Syria," *The Jerusalem Report*, January 12, 1995.

³ Schattner, Marius. "Sabra and Shatila: the horror Israel wants forgotten," *Agence France Presse*, September 14, 2007.

⁴ Rudge, David. "Christians propose autonomy for security zone," *Jerusalem Post*, June 10, 1999.

⁵ Human Rights Watch. "Torture in Khiam Prison: Responsibility and Accountability," *Human Rights Watch*, October 27, 1999.

⁶ Pippert, Wesley. "Untitled," *United Press International*, September 21, 1984.

⁷ Marlow, Lara. "Deal is short of full Syrian Troop Withdrawal," *The Irish Times*, March 8, 2005.

⁸ Farrell, William. "We had a right, Phalangist says of massacre," *New York Times*, December 2, 1982.

You have previously stated that you were considering Ayaan Hirsi Ali as a witness. In a 2007 interview with Reason Magazine⁹ Ali said, “I think that we are at war with Islam” and called for Islam to be “defeated.” In the same interview, Ali suggested that the U.S. Constitution should be amended to allow for discrimination against religious minorities.

While you later withdrew Ali from consideration, we must question the background review process that results in you publicly offering support for people such as Ali and Phares.

Additionally, we remain concerned by your decision to advance unsubstantiated allegations such as, “you could say that 80%, 85% of the mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists,”¹⁰ which you recently declared that you “stand by.”¹¹

We believe it is reasonable to ask that you offer a public explanation of the process that is leading you to advance such troubling witnesses and erroneous information.

The threat of violent extremism to our nation is a profoundly serious issue. We agree with you that political correctness should not interfere in any serious investigation of threats to our nation. However, we do believe that reliable witnesses and verifiable information are crucial to properly evaluating the threat.

We therefore respectfully request that you drop Walid Phares as a witness for your planned hearing and reiterate our request that you meet with national leaders of the American Muslim community to discuss the negative impact your hearings could have on ordinary American Muslims.

Sincerely,

Nihad Awad
National Executive Director

cc: U.S. House Speaker Rep. John Boehner

⁹ Bakel, Rogiervan. “The trouble is the West’: [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#) on Islam, immigration, civil liberties, and the fate of the West,” Reason, November 1, 2007.

¹⁰ “Politically Incorrect, but King is Right” New York Daily News, March 29, 2004.

¹¹ “Lawmaker Plans Controversial Hearings on Islamic Threat,” The Forward, January 7, 2011.