

Joint Statement Regarding Upcoming Summit on Countering Violent Extremism

February 17, 2015

The undersigned human rights, civil liberties, and community-based organizations write to express our continuing concerns regarding the upcoming Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) summit to be held at the White House on February 18-19, 2015.

Many of our organizations have received invitations to the Summit. Some of us plan to attend, while others have declined. Regardless of our direct participation in the Summit, we stand united to express our grave concerns with the framework of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which almost exclusively focuses on Muslim communities in the United States and abroad. We have raised these concerns in the past, separately and in concert. We have yet to receive a meaningful response from the Administration.

Briefly, our continuing concerns with the CVE framework are as follows:

Stigmatization of American Muslim communities. Government engagement with American Muslim communities from a CVE standpoint sets American Muslim communities apart as inherently suspect. CVE falls within a long line of programs that defines relationships with American Muslim communities based on a security lens, without meaningfully addressing civil and human rights problems that have repeatedly been highlighted by community members and organizations and civil rights groups. Additionally, the nearly exclusive focus on Muslim communities exacerbates the culture of hostility and suspicion in which hate violence by private actors and civil rights violations have become commonplace. A civil rights framework, for example, would be far more appropriate for meaningful engagement with American Muslim communities

Reliance on flawed models. CVE programs rely on flawed models of radicalization that posit political or religious expression as “indicators” or “predictors” of violent behavior, despite evidence that such models do not work.

Impact on religious experience and political expression. Where CVE tasks community members to expansively monitor the beliefs and expressive or associational activities of other Muslims, it reproduces the same negative effects of government surveillance by creating a climate of fear and chilling constitutionally protected activity.

Relationship to abusive counterterrorism practices. CVE is purportedly premised on mutual trust between American Muslim communities and law enforcement. However, such mutual trust is difficult, if not impossible, given the FBI’s practices regarding the use of informants, sting operations, and deceptively conducting intelligence gathering under the guise of community outreach. Given this history and the fact that law enforcement agencies will play the lead role in implementing CVE, it is difficult for communities to take seriously or trust this most recent initiative.

Funding of private individuals and organizations. By choosing which community and religious partners to fund or collaborate with, the government may directly or indirectly be perceived as advancing one ideology or set of beliefs over others.

The process for planning and organizing this summit has furthered the sense of mistrust already felt by American Muslim communities. From the outset, the administration has not consulted with a broad range of groups concerning the planning, content, and implementation of CVE. Additionally, the administration has not formally responded to a letter delivered in December by many groups signing this letter today. In fact, up until the last moment, very little information had been provided to participants about the agenda for the Summit.

Because of these concerns, many of the undersigned organizations must decline the invitation to participate in the upcoming CVE summit. However, we have collectively decided that representatives from some of our groups will attend in order to provide a sorely missing critical perspective on the CVE framework and to seek more information about the rollout and implementation of CVE pilot programs in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Boston.

Of course, attendance at the summit by any of the undersigned groups does not constitute endorsement of the CVE framework or of the summit itself. Jointly and individually, our groups will continue to raise concerns about the CVE framework with government stakeholders and the general public.

Signed

American Civil Liberties Union
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Arab American Association of New York
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility Project at CUNY School of Law
DRUM – South Asian Organizing Center
Muslim Advocates
National Network for Arab American Communities
South Asian Americans Leading Together