



Council on American-Islamic Relations  
453 New Jersey Ave. S.E.  
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Jalen Miller  
National President  
College Democrats of America  
430 South Capitol Street Southeast  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Miller,

I write on behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. As you may know, CAIR is our nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization. Our mission is to promote justice, protect civil rights and enhance the public's understanding of Islam.

Our civil rights organization writes to express deep concern about complaints we have received regarding an atmosphere of anti-Muslim bigotry within the College Democrats of America. Numerous Muslim members of the CDA tell us that they have experienced bigotry, harassment, and marginalization because of their religious values, particularly at the chapter level.

*"There is a pattern of Muslims being targeted, censored, and pushed out of CDA. I have seen it several times with several Muslim members and leaders of this organization,"* an elected member of the organization told us. *"It is enraging."*

Another member wrote: *"Existing as a leader in College Democrats of America and being unapologetically Muslim is hard. It can definitely be confusing and scary at times. Truthfully, we shouldn't be challenged on standing up for ourselves when our communities' stories are on the line."*

The current chair of the Muslim Caucus of the CDA, Tyrese Rice, told us, *"This is not my first position or experience working with CDA, I entered the organization as the I.D.E.A. Director of College Democrats Oklahoma. In that first position, I was made well aware of the bigoted and imbalanced implications of the organization, from state to national level."*

These are just a few of the statements we have received from CDA members regarding their experiences within the CDA. We have also been informed that the current vice president of the College Democrats of America, Nourhan Mesbah, has experienced a sustained campaign of online harassment since she launched her campaign for the position earlier this year.

Members of the CDA have repeatedly harassed her, with some even "liking" a comment on social media that called her a "jihadist," including the National Rural Caucus Chair and the AU Dems I.D.E.A. Chair. The statement said, in part, *"Boot this jihadist out [of the CDA], no room for racist totalitarianism."* We have enclosed screenshots of some of this abusive behavior.



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Outside anti-Muslim organizations have also targeted Vice President Mesbah by weaponizing an inappropriate comment she made online as a thirteen-year-old (and later apologized for). A story targeting Nourhan was [published](#) in *The Algemeiner*, a far-right website with a history of embracing Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism.

Despite such harassment of Vice President Mesbah, some CDA members made this danger worse by voting to publicly condemn her and demand she apologize for her teenage remark even though she had already done so. In addition, we have received allegations that the current National I.D.E.A Director has dismissed credible allegations of Islamophobia while using his position to unfairly and baselessly single out and target Vice President Mesbah.

All of this is unacceptable, especially at an organization that claims to believe in the importance of diversity, inclusivity and tolerance.

*"I joined College Dems with the hope of bringing about new and meaningful representation, especially for Muslims in CDA," a member wrote to us. "I was met with instances of harassment, bigotry, and hate. It was always perpetuated on all levels. Islamophobia was a regular occurrence and became a commonplace issue I faced daily. The bigotry ranges from covert to obvious and remains mainstream as an institutional issue, especially from those in State and Chapter leadership. It is a never-ending pain. The generally accepted Islamophobia is a constant reminder that our fight for equity in political spaces is nowhere near over. College Dems need to start caring about and prioritizing the Muslim community now."*

As you know, anti-Muslim hate persists, including in educational settings. Just last year, CAIR received over 6,000 complaints involving discrimination, harassment, bullying, physical assaults and other incidents nationwide. Young Muslims involved in political activism are at extreme risk of facing such harassment, especially if they advocate for Palestinian human rights.

The College Democrats of America must take immediate steps to address anti-Muslim bigotry within its own ranks. To that end, we ask the CDA to:

- 1) Require all elected CDA officials at the national and state level to undergo training on Islam and Islamophobia hosted by an organization approved by the Muslim Caucus of the CDA.
- 2) Conduct a new, neutral and impartial investigation into allegations of harassment and other mistreatment of Muslim members of the CDA, including Nourhan Mesbah, and take appropriate action to discipline or expel members who engaged in such harassment. This investigation should not be conducted by the current National I.D.E.A. director, who should instead be a subject of the investigation.
- 3) Adopt and publish a resolution affirming the CDA's commitment to welcome Muslim Americans and respect their perspectives, including support for Palestinian human rights.



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Again, please review the rest of this document for statements from Muslim and non-Muslim CDA members about their experiences and perspectives on Islamophobia within the organization.

We look forward to your response. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward Ahmed Mitchell, III".

Edward Ahmed Mitchell, Esq.  
Deputy Executive Director  
Council on American-Islamic Relations

**STATEMENTS FROM CDA MEMBERS ON FOLLOWING PAGES**

CC: Jeremy Ward, National I.D.E.A. Director of the College Democrats of America



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**Statements from Muslim CDA Members:**

**Statement 1:** *“My name is Tyrese Rice, I am the current Chair of the Muslim Caucus of the College Democrats of America. This is not my first position or experience working with CDA, I entered the organization as the I.D.E.A. Director of College Democrats Oklahoma. In that first position, I was made well aware of the bigoted and imbalanced implications of the organization, from state to national level. There was a lack of Muslim representation and an underlying stigma against discussion related topics and concepts. So to be here now testifying to the outrageous approach made against our Vice President, Nourhan Mesbah, is unfortunately unsurprising to me.”*

- Tyrese Rice, Chair of the CDA Muslim Caucus

**Statement 2:** *“As a Shia Muslim woman, I understand the feeling of being secluded, ignored, and not being heard. I have also realized how crucial it is for all communities within the Muslim ummah to be united, to be heard, and to feel like they do matter. Now more than ever, unification is key to fighting all forms of Islamophobia and fighting for inclusion in all communities and organizations. Which is why I am deeply saddened to hear about the CDA’s decision to have Vice President, Nourhan Mesbah, undergo training with anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian, racist organizations. The CDA must take back this dangerous decision that puts Nourhan at risk and does not promote unification in any way. This will only perpetuate further bigotry, prejudice, and even more division within the CDA. Muslims should have every right to participate and engage in civic activities without fearing for their safety and being subject to racism. People of all communities should have the right to be represented and have their voice heard in all political spaces.”*

- Malaika Var, CDA Muslim Caucus Vice Chair

**Statement 3:** *“The Democratic Party does not have a good understanding of Muslims both here in America and with our families throughout the world. It's a symptom of a greater issue throughout the country and isn't locked-down to people who are in politics. I have faith in the younger generations, growth has been seen, but the lack of understanding continues to persist even at the Collegiate level. Muslims throughout the diaspora are making their way into public service, but continue to be beaten down by being misunderstood. Existing as a leader in College Democrats of America and being unapologetically Muslim is hard. It can definitely be confusing and scary at times. Truthfully, we shouldn't be challenged on standing up for ourselves when our communities stories are on the line. These moments shape the formative years for a young person's ability to persist in politics. There's still a significant ways to go for the American political system to accept Muslims. In order to meet our needs we have to do it ourselves.”*

- Anonymous Current Muslim Caucus Member



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**Statement 4:** *“My experience within CDA has been like how a teacher/professor always ignores the Muslim student when talking about Islam, but everyone looks at you because you’re the only Muslim in the room. It’s always one or two voices against groups of people. It’s always one or two Muslims voices against a group of ignorant people.*

*However, I can date two incidents where our voice was excluded to a topic that pertained to our caucus: during the last passed resolutions of CDA, the one about the UYGHUR MUSLIMS was not drafted, or even edited by our Caucus. We only were allowed to suggest and only because we had to fight it to be involved since a member of CDA had stated “Uyghur Muslim Activist fuels anti-Asian sentiment” (it’s ignorant to say that a persecuted Asian is anti-Asian or that Muslim fuels Islamophobia – who in their right mind would accuse a persecuted victim of wanting to be persecuted?) and because of this, despite the resolution being about Islam and the war on terror, on us Muslims, we had to substitute the word Uyghur MUSLIMS for Uyghur PEOPLE. It’s a technical word that rejects to call the problem by its name: ISLAMOPHOBIA.”*

- *Anonymous Muslim Caucus Member*

**Statement 5:** *“As a Muslim, and as a founding member of the Muslim Caucus, I have seen Nourhan evolve within College Dems of America to being our only national representation. I feel angry, attacked, persecuted, and censored. What they are doing to Nourhan, they are doing to our community. There is a pattern of Muslims being targeted, censored, and pushed out of CDA. I have seen it several times with several Muslim members and leaders of this organization. It is enraging.*

*CDA continues to dismiss our struggles as Muslim. My people continue to get killed, targeted, and censored on a global level. CDA membership has shown they do not feel that weight and, actually, perpetuate the rhetoric that fuels violent islamophobia.*

*Nourhan’s tweet from when she was 13 was picked apart because of her being targeted. She was a minor who had no understanding. Now, this continues to be used to perpetuate violent Islamophobia that is persecuting Muslims in CDA, as is seen in many political spaces.*

*Islam is a religion of peace. We are not synonymous with antisemitism. We are tired of being harassed, targeted, censored, and persecuted. I am tired.”*

- *Anonymous Muslim Caucus Member*



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**Statement 6:** *“As an outsider looking into the College Democrats of America elections, I was appalled at the blatant Islamophobia that multiple members had to confront. Mistakes were made, albeit when the members were minors, but cruel injustice cannot be dealt out under a veil of accountability.*

*Scrutiny for bigotry should be welcomed and expected. Asks equating to proper apologies and some introspection are understandable. But those errors should not be used to mischaracterize Muslims and their identity.*

*Moreover, we must not allow the conflation of these mistakes with their activism for often very personal causes such as Palestinian liberation. That is exactly what has taken place since the elections, after which a tone-deaf resolution was passed. By creating a space to allow Muslim members to be called “jihadist[s]” among other names, we have abandoned our progressive ideals.*

*With demands that Nourhan take training from organizations that have checkered pasts with the Islamic community rather than organizations like the Jewish Voice for Peace, I, as a minority woman, am afraid that we have gone beyond asking for accountability. We have resorted to denying her of her dignity because of her religion.”*

- *Anonymous Member of CDA*

**Statement 7:** *“As someone who helped manage the campaigns of two Muslims, both of which experienced heavily targeted attacks from outside organizations to delegitimize both their values and who they are in College Democrats of America. It is really hurtful to see members within this organization take these attacks and then perpetuate Islamophobia on the scale that we have seen. Every day is a new battle seeing how Muslims are forced to navigate their way in an organization that does not even attempt to welcome them at the bare minimum.*

*Muslims, specifically Muslim women, are held to an impossible standard. Even on the campaign trail, it was everyday hearing how neither Tasneem nor Nourhan were fit for their roles. No one should have to feel unsafe or be forced to combat violent Islamophobia every day for an organization that claims to be fulfilling IDEA values. Those very values need to start with making this organization a safe and productive place for Muslims to both work and exist in”*

- *Evan DeGraff (he/him), Co-Chief of Staff for College Democrats of America President’s Office, and Former Campaign Manager for CDA ReConnected.*



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**Statement 8:** *“It is important to address Islamophobia in our organization because we are influenced by our society. Within College Democrats we have seen time and time again where Muslim students felt invalidated or unwelcomed because of Islamophobia. Our organization has continued to fail Muslim students and Muslim democrats and we must not only have a conversation on the problematic normalcy of Islamophobic micro aggressions, we must be anti-Islamophobic and continue to address our own biases against the Muslim community.”*

- *Carlos McKnight (he/him) CDA Black Caucus Chair*

**Statement 9:** *“The National I.D.E.A. Director did not make meeting with me a priority, he didn’t even set up a meeting with me, despite me being a Muslim leader in CDA who was publicly harassed. He continues to work around Muslims in CDA, speak over us, and shut us out of the room. He has not even shown care that the Muslim caucus is boycotting or feeling hurt about all of this, despite his position requiring him to be inclusive, he has only excluded us.”*

- *Anonymous Muslim CDA Member*

CC: Jeremy Ward, National I.D.E.A. Director of the College Democrats of America