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FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

... a Quaker lobby in the public interest

March 8, 2011

Members
Committee on Homeland Security

Dear Representative:

We call on you to reject the premise for the hearings called by the chair of the Homeland Security Committee, Rep. Peter King, on the "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response." As a faith-based group, we believe strongly that it is inappropriate for Congress to inquire into the teachings and practices of any religion. Congress is empowered, rather, to inquire into criminal actions and plans that are detrimental to the United States, without regard to religion.

The committee's chair has publicly dismissed criticism of the topic of this week's hearing, saying that the concerns are based on "political correctness." We would urge the committee to consider that our objections are based, rather, on constitutional correctness. This Congress, with its heightened concern that all congressional actions be grounded on the Constitution, must not lose sight of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which takes religion off of Congress's agenda: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The unfairness and disingenuousness of singling out this one religion, when the majority of terrorist acts committed in this country in recent decades have been committed by people with other or no religious roots, is appalling. The threatening and violent consequences of such a hearing are already evident to the mainstream of Americans who disdain the false divisions promoted by this hearing. The threat is particularly injurious to women, who are most visible as Muslims due to their garb.

Congress has a responsibility to conduct its affairs in accordance with the Constitution, and in a manner that will not create an immediate and lasting danger for a significant number of Americans.

In faith,

Ruth Flower
Associate Executive Secretary for Legislative Program