



New Report: NYPD Spying and its Impact on American Muslims

March 11, 2013 – American Muslim civil liberties groups released a new report today, *Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims*, documenting the devastating impacts of the New York Police Department's (NYPD) extensive surveillance program that targeted American Muslims throughout the Northeast and spread outrage throughout the nation.

Since 2002, the NYPD embarked on a covert domestic surveillance program that monitored American Muslims throughout the Northeast, from spying on neighborhood cafes and places of worship to infiltrating student whitewater-rafting trips – a program that continued despite the NYPD's own acknowledgment that, over the course of six years, these efforts had not generated a single lead. The report is an unprecedented collection of voices from affected community members reflecting how the NYPD spying and infiltration creates a pervasive climate of fear and suspicion that encroaches upon every aspect of their religious, political, and community lives.

The report was prepared by the Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition, and its partner organizations the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) project at Main Street Legal Services, Inc. of the CUNY School of Law, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). American Muslim community members delivered the report to NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly and Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence David Cohen today at 1 Police Plaza.

"This report provides a powerful rebuttal to the NYPD and its supporters' assertion that surveillance is harmless and victimless," said Diala Shamas, a Liman Fellow at the CLEAR project and one of the report's authors. "It is a first-of-its kind opportunity to hear directly from affected community members, many of whom would only speak with us on condition of strict anonymity."

"NYPD surveillance has impacted every facet of American Muslim life," said Nermeen Arastu, a volunteer attorney with AALDEF. "The program has stifled speech, communal life and religious practice and criminalized a broad segment of American Muslims. The isolationism that comes with being a "spied on" community means that American Muslims are getting a fundamentally inferior opportunity to exercise their constitutional rights."

The extensive, in-depth interviews indicate that fear of surveillance has resulted in a decline participation and level of involvement in religious activities, community and social activities, and Muslim student organizations. The findings document, among other things:

- Impacts on students on college campuses, including silencing their activism, alienating their student groups, and affecting their academic choices;

- Suppressing religious spaces, as mosque congregants become suspicious of one another, imams hesitate when advising their congregants, and individuals refrain from appearing overtly 'Muslim' to avoid triggering surveillance;
- Silencing speech and political activism - from engagement in public debates and protests, to friendly coffee-house banter;
- Damaging the NYPD's own relationship with American Muslims in New York City, breaching communities' much-needed relationship of trust with those who are tasked with protecting them.

"This report is critically important reading for all Americans concerned with freedom, justice, and equality in 21st century America," said Imam Al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid, Majlis Ash-Shura of Metropolitan New York. "It is the authentic voice of real people impacted by unjust policies and procedures, for which Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly remain both defensive and un-apologetic. Further, it is a powerful rebuttal to all who seek to minimize the impact of NYPD surveillance of Muslims as a faith group, even as they strive to do the same with the program known as 'Stop and Frisk'."

"As former NYPD Deputy Commissioner for Counterterrorism Richard Falkenrath made clear, 'the vast majority of the people from [Muslim] communities -- the vast, vast majority -- are no threat at all and simply want to live in peace and enjoy everything the city has to offer,'" said NYC Councilmember Brad Lander. "So why is the NYPD constantly surveilling them in mosques, restaurants, cafes, and college student groups? There's just too much evidence that the NYPD's surveillance program has targeted Muslim communities simply based on religion and ethnicity, with no real leads, and -- by NYPD Chief Thomas Galati's own admission -- nothing to show for it. The result is frayed police-community relations, and a profound chilling effect on First Amendment-protected speech and worship. The time has come to pass the Community Safety Act to ban policing based on racial and religious profiling, and to establish an NYPD Inspector General to make sure that the NYPD follows the rules."

Contact:

Diala Shamas, diala.shamas@law.cuny.edu, 718 340 4533

Ujala Sehgal, usehgal@aaldef.org, 646 207 1497

About the authors:

MACLC is a New York-based coalition of citizens, community and faith leaders, organizers, advocates and attorneys. MACLC aims to give voice to absent perspectives on issues of national security, counterterrorism, law enforcement, and civil rights, especially as they impact Muslim communities in post-9/11 New York City. Members of the coalition include: Muslim American Society of New York, Women in Islam, Inc. Muslim Bar Association of New York; Council on American Islamic Relations - New York; Desis Rising Up and Moving; Arab American

Association of New York; Muslim Consultative Network; Association of Muslim American Lawyers; Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Muslim Progressive Traditionalist Alliance.

AALDEF, founded in 1974, is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. Through a combination of litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.

CLEAR is housed at Main Street Legal Services, Inc., the clinical arm of CUNY School of Law. It addresses the legal needs of Muslim, Arab, South Asian and other communities in the New York City area that are affected by counterterrorism policies and practices.