

**Remarks by Dr. Ingrid Mattson, President, The Islamic Society of North America
Town Hall meeting with John Brennan, Assistant to the President and Deputy
National Security Adviser for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism
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New York University School of Law**

Thank you all for giving your Saturday morning to meet here today – a meeting that is, above all, intended to strengthen the relationship between citizens and their government – and to allow for more open communication, so that Americans can join together with our distinct cultural, religious, ethnic and political affiliations, for the sake of promoting the common good and security in this nation.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 shocked all of us, and left us feeling vulnerable, confused and angry. Looking back, I can see now that on that day I overestimated some threats, and I underestimated some of the terrible things that were to come.

The support and activism of the interfaith community in solidarity with American Muslims was extraordinary. Mainstream Christian and Jewish organizations, not to mention the Sikhs – often collateral casualties of anti-Muslim hate crimes – as well as others came to our defense and carried us through some of the worst times.

From President Bush’s visit to a mosque and defense of hijab-clad women, to the Justice Department’s vigorous pursuit of hate-crimes, we had some important support from our own government.

At the same time, we faced actions from the government that brought many dark days to our communities: raids on our immigrant neighborhoods, so-called “special registration,” the closure of a number of our institutions, the naming of American citizens as enemy combatants, the suspension of habeas corpus on detainees, and their torture in the most grotesque manner, including the exploitation of their – and our -- religious beliefs to destabilize and demoralize interrogees. From ideologues, Muslim Americans faced slander and vicious attacks on our leaders, our institutions, our faith and our religious practices – and these ideologues influenced some in government with their distorted and fabricated claims.

President Obama promised to do away with unjust policies established in the previous administration, and we were encouraged by the first executive orders he signed, banning torture. In the last year, because of the President’s leadership, we have been consulted about the impact a number of policies have had on our communities. We know that the president cannot do everything alone, and that our community needs to continue to be active to engage legislators, and to be mindful of the role of the courts in issues that affect us.

Nine years out, the Muslim American community faces four major threats to our existence and identity:

1. Like all other Americans, we are vulnerable to terrorist attacks on the US. Al-Qaeda and other terrorists consider us at best, collateral damage, at worst, apostates and collaborators. Across the world, Muslims have suffered at the hands of al-Qaeda more than anyone else. For this reason, if no other, Muslim Americans want law enforcement to be effective in protecting all of us against terrorist acts.
2. The cult-like tactics of terrorist recruiters to entice our youth to their ideology and mission. We do not want to lose our children to a revolutionary fantasy in religious guise.
3. Hate-speech and attacks from a conglomeration of religious bigots, racists, political ideologues and xenophobes. We do not want to be alienated and stigmatized in our own country, and we look to our political leaders to set a responsible tone.
4. Government actions that impinge on the freedom of our community to organize, to freely express our religious values and to engage in the lawful advocacy of our positions. We need the freedom to build an ethical, productive community of faithful American Muslims – something we cannot do if we have to fritter away our resources defending ourselves against bogus charges.

In Cairo, addressing the people of Muslim nations, many of whom suffer under authoritarian regimes, President Obama spoke of fundamental rights for which all people yearn: “ - the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice -.” The President concluded: “Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure.” We gathered here today as American Muslims (and our friends), could not agree more, and we wish for no less for all of us.”

We are grateful that we live in a country where we can discuss these issues with our government, and where the person who has so much responsibility for ensuring our security and our rights is meeting with us today, to answer our questions and concerns. He is one person, at least, who I am confident gets even less sleep than I do, for he bears the weight of protecting a nation of over 300 million people from countless known and unknown threats. I am happy that I do not know everything he has to know, but if someone has to know these things, and take action upon them, I feel safer for the fact that he requested to meet with us, to hear our concerns, and to take into account our perspective as he advises the president on how to keep all of us safe.

It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. John Brennan, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Adviser for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism.