



**Statement for High-Level Meeting/Conference between the U.S. Department of Justice
and U.S. Interfaith Leaders of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation**

We stand together, united as religious and business leaders of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, who have effectively worked worldwide on behalf of religious freedom and the protection of places of worship.

The guarantee of freedom of worship lies at the core of America's founding and Constitution. Yet houses of worship throughout our Nation have increasingly become the targets of violence in Churches, Synagogues, Temples, Mosques, or other faith traditions' places of worship; acts that threaten the safety of people of faith. Americans must be able to gather freely at their places of worship, without obstruction, violence, threats, or intimidation – waged as hate crimes against them. This high-level meeting reaffirming our First Amendment right to protect both our religious liberties and freedom of speech is a first step.

One year ago today, two children were killed and another twenty-one injured during a school-wide mass at the Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis. One month later four people were killed when an assailant drove his pickup truck into the Church of Latter-day Saints in the Grand Blanc Township of Michigan.

We recall with great pain the attack at the Islamic Center of San Diego, killing three; a lone arsonist setting fire to Beth Israel Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi because of its "Jewish ties." The murder of six worshippers at the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin; the attack at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where nine were murdered; and the eleven lives snuffed out at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

These tragedies only serve to further our focus that we stand together, determined to be ever more vigilant to protect and guard against our Constitutional and God given liberties and freedom.

As we stand before you: Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, collectively representing over 250 million people of faith across the United States, and with the U.S. Department of Justice we seek to both support and strengthen existing national strategies as well as develop plans and policies to more effectively safeguard believers of all faiths as they seek to worship. We propose the establishment of this convening body of religious leaders. Additionally, we aim to encourage a stronger, no-tolerance strategy for countering hatred of all people of faith in this country; and we thank and support the U.S. Department of Justice's Zero-Tolerance Policy towards the violation of these liberties of Americans and its putting resources and active, swift and timely prosecution of those who attack and desecrate houses of worship.

The interfaith Appeal of Conscience Foundation and its religious leaders vehemently denounce these attacks and condemn all acts or threats of violence, intimidation, or endangerment directed towards people of faith. Therefore, we now call upon the U.S. Department of Justice to do all in its power to uphold its mandate and mission "To uphold the rule of law, to keep our country safe, and to protect civil rights" and do so by working with us to establish and defend a one-hundred foot buffer zone around houses of worship. The purpose of such a zone is to establish a safe space for worshippers from those who would engage in



acts of hatred, violence, or intimidation against them, or engage in any action attempting to deface or destroy their house of worship. When established we pledge to support the Department in its enforcement, urging that its violators be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

The Foundation believes that to heal our wounded world, we must emerge as a united human family, seeking improvement by advancing peaceful coexistence and “Respect the Other” seeing in each other the image of God in which the Bible tells us all humankind have been created. As such, fulfilling our pledge, to be one Nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

Submitted by Karen Schneier Dresbach, Executive Vice President

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