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Groups Seek End To Religious Questioning At The Border By Federal Agents

ACLU And Muslim Advocates Urge DI-IS Internal Watchdog To Stop Interrogations Of Innocent American Travelers Perceived To Be Muslim

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents are questioning innocent Americans who are perceived to be Muslim about their religion and their political beliefs without any suspicion that they have done anything wrong, according to a letter the American Civil Liberties Union and Muslim Advocates sent to the top internal watchdog at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today. The ACLU and Muslim Advocates sent the letter on behalf of five individuals who have been questioned about their religious and political beliefs, associations and religious practices and charitable giving when returning to the United States from abroad. The letter asks the DHS inspector general to investigate CBP's treatment of the individuals and whether other travelers are being subjected to similar treatment.

"Government agents have no business interrogating innocent Americans about something as personal as where and how they worship," said Nusrat Choudhury, staff attorney with the ACLU National Security Project. "While the government has a legitimate interest in verifying the identity of people entering the country, this sort of intrusive questioning does nothing but waste resources, generate false leads and alienate entire communities."

All of the individuals described in the letter have been detained at border crossings or airports and were asked questions about constitutionally protected information and behavior, including what mosque they attend and how often, what charities they give money to, how they feel about U.S. foreign policy and how many gods or prophets they believe in.

"How often you pray, or whether you pray at all, should not be grounds for suspicion when you travel," said Nura Maznavi, Counsel for Muslim Advocates Program to End Racial and Religious Profiling. "This kind of questioning of innocent Americans by armed federal agents is contrary to our nation's founding values, values that keep our private political views and religious beliefs free from government intrusion."

In today's letter, the groups ask the inspector general to conduct an investigation to determine whether DHS and CBP have a policy of questioning travelers about their religious and political beliefs and practices, and if that policy complies with the Constitution and federal law. They also ask whether CBP's questioning of the individual travelers violated their constitutional rights or the law, what standards govern the use of information provided during the questioning and whether

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