

April 6, 2017

Richard Rendon, Founder
Empower Peace
240 Commercial Street, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02109

Abdirahman Yusuf, Executive Director
Somali Development Center
205 Green St
Jamaica Plain MA 02130

Said Ahmed, Executive Director
United Somali Youth
100 Malcolm X Blvd
Boston MA 02120

Dear Empower Peace, Somali Development Center, and United Somali Youth:

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, write to express our deep concerns about funding your organizations were awarded through the Massachusetts “Promoting Engagement, Acceptance and Community Empowerment” (“PEACE”) grant flowing from the Department of Justice¹, part of a federal law enforcement “Countering Violent Extremism” (“CVE”) program. We recognize the importance of the work your organizations do in your local communities to build grassroots leadership, empower youth, and encourage intercultural dialogue, and that this important work requires funding to be sustainable. We also recognize that participation in CVE by accepting this particular grant can seriously compromise your ability to achieve your missions — particularly now that the program is controlled by an administration displaying outright animus towards Muslims. We therefore urge you to return all CVE grant funds. Declining and returning these funds will help to protect the safety, privacy, dignity, and health of the individuals and communities you serve and will additionally help defend your organizations from damage to your missions through avoiding association with federal counter-terrorism programs that increase stigma towards, and targeting of, Muslim communities.

Human and civil rights advocacy groups have consistently raised strong concerns about the harms CVE programs inflict on Muslim youth and other marginalized communities since the U.S. campaign was first announced.² Many of our organizations urged others not to apply for CVE funding when grants were opened in 2016 due to the track record of the British program on which CVE was modeled, which profiled and stigmatized marginalized communities.³ Now, although your organizations have already been awarded CVE funds, we believe the Trump administration’s blatant anti-Muslim policies and rhetoric, anticipated rebranding of CVE to focus exclusively on Muslims, and appointments of overtly anti-Muslim federal officials who are sure to have

¹ See MASSACHUSETTS EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, *Three Boston-Based Organizations Chosen for 210K in PEACE Project Grants* (Dec. 1, 2016), available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/newsroom/press-releases/eohhs/three-boston-based-orgs-chosen-for-210k-in-peace-grants.html>; Philip Marcelo, *APNewsBreak: Effort to Stem Homegrown US Extremism Launches*, AP (Dec. 8, 2016), available at <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/36728cd212d74d4ea22287339fe8524b/apnewsbreak-effort-stem-homegrown-us-extremism-launches>.

² See, e.g., AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, *Coalition Letter to Obama Administration on Countering Violent Extremism Program* (Dec. 18, 2014), available at https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/assets/141218_cve_coalition_letter_2.pdf; BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE, *Boston Coalition Letter to the Department of Homeland Security Regarding CVE Programs* (June 6, 2014), available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/DHSenvoy%20060614.pdf>.

³ See AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF MASSACHUSETTS & MUSLIM JUSTICE LEAGUE, *Are You or Your Organization Considering Applying for Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) “PEACE” Project Grant? Here are Some Things You Should Know*, available at <https://aclum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/cve-flyer.pdf>.

input into how CVE operates under the new administration⁴ provide a clear opportunity for — and, in fact, compel — reconsideration. All of these developments counsel strongly in favor of ceasing collaboration in the CVE campaign.

While CVE has been consistently and appropriately criticized for the junk science and flawed premises on which it relies⁵ and its treatment of Muslim communities as if they are potential threats to be managed,⁶ the Trump administration’s approach to CVE is even more concerning. Press reports indicate that the new administration plans to rebrand CVE as “Countering Islamic Extremism” (“CIE”) or “Countering Radical Islamic Extremism” (“CRIE”), which would publicly clarify an intent to exclusively target Muslims with the campaign.⁷ The anticipated renaming of CVE not only places Muslims at even greater risk of increased surveillance and criminalization, but also rhetorically suggests that politically-motivated violence against Muslims by non-Muslims, such as the recent shooting of six worshippers at a Quebec mosque, is less dangerous to society than violence committed by Muslims — less dangerous even than certain nonviolent political or religious views the new administration may deem “extreme.”⁸

The Obama administration publicly claimed that CVE would be implemented in a manner that is non-discriminatory and consistent with civil rights protections.⁹ However, federal statements about the ostensible need for CVE, the targets of law enforcement outreach promoting CVE to community-based organizations, and the identity of community-based grant recipients made clear that even under that administration, CVE focused

⁴ For example, Donald Trump’s advisor Steve Bannon, in his prior role directing Breitbart news, conducted dozens of interviews with anti-Muslim conspiracy theorists. See MOTHER JONES, *Trump Campaign CEO Was a Big Promoter of Anti-Muslim Extremists* (Sept. 15, 2016), available at <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/09/stephen-bannon-donald-trump-muslims-fear-loathing>. Trump’s appointment to lead the Department of Justice, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, has made a number of statements portraying Muslim immigrants and refugees and their children as special security threats. Sessions claimed in 2015 that “In just the last year, refugees and migrants allowed into America from Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ghana, Kuwait and Bangladesh have been implicated in terrorism. And, as we have seen, the U.S.-born children of migrants are also at risk for radicalization,” and, “[I]t is an unpleasant but unavoidable fact that bringing in a large unassimilated flow of migrants from the Muslim world creates the conditions possible for radicalization and extremism to take hold.” THE ATLANTIC, *Jeff Sessions’s Fear of Muslim Immigrants* (Feb. 8, 2017), available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/jeff-sessions-has-long-feared-muslim-immigrants/516069/>.

⁵ See Michael German, *Stigmatizing Boston’s Muslim Community is No Way to Build Trust*, THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (Oct. 9, 2014), available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/stigmatizing-boston-muslim-community-no-way-build-trust>; Alice Ross, *Academics Criticize Anti-Radicalisation Strategy in Open Letter*, THE GUARDIAN (Sept. 28, 2016), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/29/academics-criticise-prevent-anti-radicalisation-strategy-open-letter> (describing widespread criticism of the methodological basis of Prevent, the British CVE program on which the US program was modeled).

⁶ See Cora Currier, *Spies Among Us: How Community Outreach Programs to Muslims Blur Lines Between Outreach and Intelligence*, THE INTERCEPT (Jan. 21, 2015), available at <https://theintercept.com/2015/01/21/spies-among-us-community-outreach-programs-muslims-blur-lines-outreach-intelligence/>.

⁷ See Julia Edwards Ainsley, Dustin Volz, & Kristina Cooke, *Exclusive: Trump to Focus Counter-Extremism Program Solely on Islam – Sources*, REUTERS (Feb. 2, 2017), available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-extremists-program-exclusiv-idUSKBN15G5VO>; Murtaza Hussain, *Trump’s Rhetoric on ‘Radical Islam’ Undermines Counterextremism Programs in U.S.*, THE INTERCEPT (Feb. 8, 2017), available at <https://theintercept.com/2017/02/08/trumps-rhetoric-on-radical-islam-undermines-counter-extremism-programs-in-u-s/>.

⁸ See J.M. Berger, *The Trump Administration is Showing White Nationalists it Won’t Fight Them at All*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 3, 2017), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/02/03/the-trump-administration-is-showing-white-nationalists-it-wont-fight-them-at-all/?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.ae31014f0716; Quinta Jurecic, *President Trump, Quebec, and the Dismantling of CVE*, LAWFARE (Feb. 6, 2017), available at <https://lawfareblog.com/president-trump-quebec-and-dismantling-cve>.

⁹ See EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* (Oct 2016), available at https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2016_strategic_implementation_plan_empowering_local_partners_prev%20%282%29.pdf

almost exclusively on Muslim¹⁰ — in particular Somali, African, Arab, Middle Eastern and South Asian — communities. Given the new administration's statements and track record, human and civil rights are at even greater risk from CVE today.

By accepting funding controlled by the Trump administration for the purpose of “countering violent extremism” — or what is likely to be renamed “countering Islamic extremism” — your organizations may unintentionally subject those you serve to increased surveillance,¹¹ stigmatization, and other harms.

We once again strongly urge that you refuse to participate in this dangerous program and assist in protecting the rights, privacy, dignity, and health of marginalized Muslim communities by declining and returning the CVE funds that you have been granted. We would welcome the opportunity to meet in person to discuss these concerns in more detail and how we can work together for the benefit of all of the communities we serve. To schedule a meeting, please be in touch with Shannon Al-Wakeel, Executive Director of Muslim Justice League, at serwin@muslimjusticeleague.org.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Massachusetts

American Friends Service Committee

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Arlington Street Church (Social Action Committee)

Asian American Resource Workshop

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA

Black and Pink

CAIR Massachusetts

Center for New Community

Chelsea Collaborative

Defending Rights and Dissent

Digital Fourth / Restore the 4th - Boston

Dorchester People for Peace

DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving

Eradicate Boston College Racism

¹⁰ See Faiza Patel and Meghan Koushik, *Countering Violent Extremism*, THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE (March 16, 2017), available at: <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/countering-violent-extremism>

¹¹ See, Spencer Ackerman, *Documents Support Fears of Muslim Surveillance by Obama-era Program* (March 16, 2017), THE GUARDIAN, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/obama-countering-violent-extremism-muslim-surveillance>

Essex County Community Organization

First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

Fostering Racial Justice Group

Harvard Islamic Society

Harvard Muslim Law Students Association

Harvard Graduate Students Union - UAW International Scholars Working Group

Intelligent Mischief

Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center - Project of MAS Boston

Jewish Voice for Peace - Boston

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Middle Eastern Law Student Association at Boston College Law School

Moishe Kavod House

Muslim Advocates

Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity

Muslim Community Link (MCL)

Muslim Justice League

Muslim Law Association at Northeastern University School of Law

National Lawyers Guild -- Massachusetts Chapter

Nimblebot

Old Cambridge Baptist Church

Phillips Brooks House Association

UMass Boston Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine

Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network

Young Muslim Collective

Individual Signatures:

Tahirah Abdullah (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

NK Acevedo

Iram Ali

Yessenia Alfaro (Chelsea Collaborative, for identification purposes only)

Natalie Arbid

Sara Arman (RIAC, for identification purposes only)

Elsa Auerbach (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Cynthia Bergeron (Theodore Parker Unitarian Universalist Church, for identification purposes only)

Josh Behrens

Sriya Bhattacharyya (Eradicate Boston College Racism, for identification purposes only)

Jessica Bochner

J. Wesley Boyd (Harvard Medical School, for identification purposes only)

Jen Brown

Joseph Brown (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Samantha Burton (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Aparna Chandrasekhar

Gabriella Chavez (SLIC, for identification purposes only)

Katie Collins (East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, for identification purposes only)

Kathleen Collins (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Gregory R. Darwin (Harvard University, for identification purposes only)

Tania Erlij (IJC at FPB, for identification purposes only)

Kevin Ferreira

Alison Goldblatt (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Laura Gonzalez

Alison Gottlieb

Cristina Groeger (HGSU-UAW, for identification purposes only)

Noah Habeeb

Matthew Hagler (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Anna Hall

Jacquie Hargrove

Alissa Hochman (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Ayesha N. Kazmi (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, for identification purposes only)

Angela Kelly

Yasmin Khan (Joslin Diabetes Center, for identification purposes only)

Sarah Kimball

Alexis Ladd (Fostering Racial Justice Group, for identification purposes only)

Sarah Langer (Moishe Kavod House, for identification purposes only)

Marena Lin (International Scholars Working Group, HGSU-UAW, for identification purposes only)

Peter Lowber (Arlington Street Church, for identification purposes only)

Alice LoCicero, Ph.D. (The Wright Institute, for identification purposes only)

Joi Louis (INIT, for identification purposes only)

Kenny MacCarthy (Sotheby's International, for identification purposes only)

Tara MacCarthy

Julia MacMahon

Jennifer Martinez (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Courtney Massaro

Robert P. Marlin, MD, PhD, MPH (Harvard Medical School, for identification purposes only)

Gloria McGillen

Keene Metzger (Old Cambridge Baptist Church, for identification purposes only)

Waqas Mirza

Kelly Morgan (Muslim Justice League, for identification purposes only)

Julie Neuspiel (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Keira O'Donovan (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Eric Parker (SAND Services Inc., for identification purposes only)

Farris Peale

Alexandra Pineros Shields (Essex County Community Organization, for identification purposes only)

Emilia Rainwalker (Dorchester People for Peace, for identification purposes only)

Jim Recht, MD

Lizabeth Roemer

Deborah Rosenkrantz (Boston Workman's Circle, for identification purposes only)

Sydney Rosensweig

Tali Ruskin (Jewish Voice for Peace, Boston, for identification purposes only)

Rev. Cody J. Sanders, PhD (Old Cambridge Baptist Church, for identification purposes only)

Heike Schotten, Associate Professor (UMass, Boston, for identification purposes only)

Ivraj Seerha

Jonathan Sepulveda

Rev. Daniel A. Smith (First Church of Cambridge, Congregational, UCC, for identification purposes only)

Dean Stevens (Community Church of Boston, for identification purposes only)

Shahbaz Soofi

Rev. Betsy Sowers (Old Cambridge Baptist Church, for identification purposes only)

Karen Suyemoto (UMass Boston, for identification purposes only)

Noor Tahirkheli

Yusufi Vali (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, for identification purposes only)

Laura Wagner (Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network, for identification purposes only)

Fadumo Warsame (Young Muslim Collective, for identification purposes only)