

Statement: AMEMSA Groups Oppose Expansion of the Countering Violent Extremism Program

In the wake of Charlottesville, the rising awareness of blatantly white supremacist groups (and statues) has understandably led to calls for greater action to prevent this violence. However, calling for the Countering Violent Extremism program to be expanded to include white supremacist groups serves to legitimate a program that surveils, profiles, censors, and divides the Muslim community. We urge our allies to refrain from lending their support to CVE programs, and to understand how the heated rhetoric around terrorism impacts the Muslim community.

Although the current administration has reportedly seen CVE under Obama as being too soft, and has pushed for a complete focus on “Islamic extremism,” CVE has always disproportionately and punitively targeted Muslim and other marginalized communities. To include white supremacist groups would not alter the foundation of the program, which is based on debunked, pseudo-scientific theories that “radical” ideas lead to violence. Moreover, inclusion of white supremacist-focused groups would not decrease or redistribute the damage done to Muslim communities as a whole through this type of surveillance.

Countering Violent Extremism programs treat Muslim communities as uniquely predisposed to commit acts of violence. Such beliefs are based on anti-Muslim racism and continue to uphold state-sanctioned Islamophobia that feeds into the larger dehumanization of our communities. The impact of mass surveillance on Muslims has been felt for years, causing distrust between us and law enforcement, and splitting our communities between those who participate in these programs and those who do not. Many of the programs and individuals participating or being asked to participate in CVE include teachers, mental health providers, and Muslim-led service organizations; beyond dividing and destroying our communities this chills access to much needed social services.¹

Inclusion of white supremacist groups, harkening back to the token funding and messaging under the Obama administration presents CVE as an equal opportunity campaign against all types of “violent extremism.” But even Life After Hate, an organization known for helping people leave white supremacist groups which was cut from CVE funding by the Trump administration, actually included a component focused on “jihadists” within their CVE proposal.² Not only has government funded CVE always disproportionately focused on Muslims, but CVE can easily be expanded to other marginalized communities deemed at-risk of “violent extremism,” as seen in the Denver Police Department’s program which would include outreach to refugee, Black Lives Matter, and LGBTQ communities.³

We can and must work together to end white supremacy in all forms, including challenging state institutions and policies like the expansion of CVE programs domestically and globally under the “War on Terror.” Inclusion of programs focused on white supremacist bigotry into a larger system of state surveillance that upholds institutional white supremacy through its criminalization of entire marginalized communities will fuel the system upon which overt bigotry thrives.

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¹ See Muslim Justice League’s Letter for the Combatting Homegrown Terrorism Hearing <https://www.muslimjusticeleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/MJL-Letter-for-Hearing-on-22Combatting-Homegrown-Terrorism22.pdf>

² Chicago Group Opposing Neo-Nazis Planned to Target Jihadists, Too <http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/2017/08/23/chicago-group-opposing-neo-nazis-planned-target-jihadists-too>

³ Denver’s counterterror program sets sights on Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ groups, and refugees <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2017/mar/09/denvers-counterterror-BLM>

Organizations

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Culture and Conflict Forum

DC Justice for Muslims

Muslim Justice League

National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

PolicyLink

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

Veterans For Peace

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Young Muslim Collective

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