

Daisy Khan: Is the NYPD Really Against Muslims?

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Over the years Commissioner Raymond Kelly's leadership of the New York Police Department has demonstrated a record of inclusion and outreach towards the Muslim community; that is why recent revelations about training videos offensive to Muslims comes as such a surprise. Commissioner Kelly now has a choice to make -- he can take clear and decisive action that is consistent with his track record, or; he can allow speculation to eat away at his years of hard work and outreach towards the Muslim community.

The Muslim community in New York and around the country has been shocked to learn that the NYPD screened the derogatory film "The Third Jihad" for well over a 1000 New York City police officers. The fact that Commissioner Kelly contributed an interview to this film, which depicts Muslims as violent fanatics bent on overthrowing the American government, and then attempted to conceal this from the public, adds insult to injury at a time when relations are already frayed by NYPD's aggressive policy of spying on American citizens. It frightens me that an institution such as the NYPD could be influenced by a small hate group's agenda.

While no one is perfect, true leadership requires the acknowledgement of errors -- even those unintended -- and a swift corrective course of action to immediately rebuild relations with the Muslim community. It was disheartening when the New York Police Department commissioned a report on Islamic terrorism without consulting Muslim experts. As Muslims, we are well aware of the challenges faced by our faith, and many of us are willing and eager to help resolve them with a range of law enforcement agencies. The fact is that simple errors and omissions can easily spiral out of control; this is what happened when the report was issued and this is what will likely occur if the NYPD continues to white-wash the training video incident.

While many are calling for Commissioner Kelly's resignation, I believe that what is most needed now is a process of reconciliation and reparation, bringing New York Muslims back to the table as full and equal partners in the fight against extremism. We must address the root cause of this incident, the anti-Muslim hate groups who use their influence to brainwash the public and undermine the credibility of the NYPD. Commissioner Kelly's own actions have proven that he is deeply committed to reaching out to Muslims, and I

know that the NYPD is capable of turning the tide from animosity and suspicion to respect and cooperation.

Under Commissioner Kelly's leadership, the police department has made great strides to attract Muslim recruits. Now there are almost 1500 Muslims serving in NYPD with police officers patrolling the streets in all boroughs, 350 of them belong to a NYPD Muslim officers Society formed in 2008, with their very own Muslim chaplain, Khalid Latif, who ministers to the need of NYPD's uniform and civilian members. If Commissioner Kelly is forced to resign, it could have a demoralizing effect on those who work so hard to keep our city safe.

Every year the Commissioner hosts an annual luncheon prior to Ramadan for hundreds of Muslim leaders from the five boroughs. These gatherings give Muslim leaders a chance to communicate directly with the Commissioner and his department about everything from radicalization to complaints about alternate-side parking regulations.

Commissioner Kelly began a series of sporting contests between police officers and the city's Muslim immigrant community. By meeting on the soccer field and the cricket pitch, officers and residents have been able to build bonds of friendship in a non-threatening environment. All too often, minorities have no interaction with the police until they are frisked, arrested, or interrogated. The department's efforts have helped to change this unfortunate reality, ensuring that members of the force have concrete social ties to the communities they are sworn to protect. That is why now is the time to call for collaboration and understanding -- not resignations.

The Department has demonstrated that Muslims stand equal to other citizens of New York City, cracking down on reports of hate crimes targeting Muslims. Because of the work of the Hate Crimes division, Muslims in New York City are able to sleep more soundly at night, secure in the knowledge that the authorities are dedicated to protecting them from bigots and hate mongers.

During 2009-10, we had the opportunity to experience firsthand the NYPD's commitment to the Muslim community. At the height of the controversy surrounding our proposal to build a Community Center near Ground Zero, when we were regularly receiving threats, Commissioner Kelly took a personal interest in our protection. Police detectives provided our staff with training and taught us how to identify people who might intend to do us harm. We were taught how to safely open suspicious packages, and the department conducted a thorough investigation of every threatening email, phone or snail mail message we received.

During this time, the police department maintained a vigilant oversight of our situation. We received personal phone numbers of key individuals and were asked to contact them at any time. I wish we had not had to go through this, but the police department proved exemplary at ensuring our safety and giving us the tools we

needed to protect ourselves.

All of these efforts have been well received and widely appreciated, and they have gone a long way to integrate Muslims into the city. The recent furor over the training video threatens all the progress that has been made, and already much of the goodwill Commissioner Kelly has helped to foster seems to have gone down the drain.

Commissioner Kelly has already apologized for his bad judgment and departmental oversight associated with allowing the screening of the video and in granting an interview to its producers, and I have no doubt that he rejects its sensationalistic, racist claims. Commissioner Kelly must not allow this video and the NYPD report to define his record towards Muslims. The Department should recharge its policy of engagement and dialogue, and make the outcome of the current crisis a catalyst for true reconciliation rather than an abrupt resignation that will obscure and overshadow all of the positive initiatives that have been developed and demoralize many dedicated NYPD officials who have done their job with integrity.

Muslims want nothing more than to be treated as equal citizens. We want law enforcement agencies to recognize that we have valid concerns and valuable advice to offer, and we ask that our law enforcement agencies and politicians respect us and understand that we are a valuable asset ready to play a role if and when asked. Time and time again, the Muslim community is held responsible for the actions of a few and many feel wounded and marginalized, but well-designed outreach programs such as those the department has created in the past can restore trust and good will between NYPD and members of the Muslim community.

NYC is the cultural, artistic and religious Mecca of the world whose Muslim population is the most diverse in the entire world. New York City should be a model of cooperation the world over. Mayor Bloomberg said at an Iftar dinner once "when New York adopts a new policy, every other major city follows suit." There is no better time than now to set an example for the world by demonstrating how ordinary Muslim citizens hand in hand with their local law enforcement can eliminate their common enemy, extremism, once and for all