

Press Release

Challenging Recent Islamophobic Hate Speech, Interfaith Coalition Stands in Solidarity with Muslim Communities

BERKELEY, CA — On December 17, faith leaders from Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim traditions shared a solidarity statement in support of Muslim communities facing hostile political rhetoric.

Representatives from Zaytuna College, America's first Muslim undergraduate liberal arts institution; United Religions Initiative, a global grassroots interfaith peace-building network; and the Graduate Theological Union, the largest and most diverse partnership of theological schools and centers from various religious traditions and cultures, held a panel discussion addressing Islamophobia, prayerful walk and vigil, and forum on Islamic teachings on peace.

"Historically, religion has provided the fertile ground that nurtured the higher standards of morals and ethics that made civilized life possible," noted Imam Zaid Shakir, co-founder and senior faculty member of Zaytuna College. "Today, as our politics and societies become increasingly uncivil, and as the lines and distances that once separated us disappear, it is incumbent on religion to assume its historical role in guiding the march of civilization. We will either come together as civilized human beings or we will be consumed by our individual barbarisms."

"A rise in Islamophobia continues to threaten our Muslim sisters and brothers," remarked the Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr., Executive Director of the United Religions Initiative (URI). "Our work as members of URI is made even more urgent by the increase in hateful speech from those who have responded to these incidents by sowing division and discord. Together, we must continue to challenge these claims and promote the positive values inherent in Islam and all religions."

"Many of us work daily to create interreligious education and engagement that fosters mutual understanding and respect," said Riess Potterveld, President of the Graduate Theological Union. "Building community that incorporates difference and, in particular, religious difference is work that needs the attention and commitment of leaders at every level of society. It is the work of building a just and peaceful world. The recent public statements that cloak Muslims with suspicion and call for exclusion display a fear and hatred that deserve the strongest condemnation."

CO-SPONSORS OF SOLIDARITY AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA EVENTS: American Baptist Seminary of the West, Center for Dharma Studies, Center for Islamic Studies, Center for Jewish Studies, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Ignite Institute at Pacific School of Religion, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Pacific School of Religion, San Francisco Theology Seminary, Starr King School for the Ministry, United Religions Initiative, and Zaytuna College