



Council on American-Islamic Relations

46-01 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Astoria, New York 11105  
www.cair-ny.org | (646) 665-7599

**STATEMENT OF  
AFAF NASHER, ESQ.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
COUNCIL ON AMERICAN ISLAMIC RELATIONS, NEW YORK**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

**FOR A HEARING CONCERNING  
RES. 1230-2016, DECLARING SUPPORT FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITIES.**

**PRESENTED  
OCTOBER 11, 2016**

B'ism Illah Al Rahman Al Raheem, we begin in the name of the Creator of all humanity, the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful

Asalamu alaikum, Greeting of Peace unto all

My name is Afaf Nasher. I am an attorney and the executive director for the NY chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, aka CAIR-NY. CAIR is the largest Muslim civil rights organization in the country, with 30 offices spread out from sea to shining sea. We advocate for the civil rights of Muslims in America who have experienced the irreparable harm of discrimination and injustice in schools, in workplaces, in the streets, and even in our homes.

I am pleased, humbled and especially grateful to have this opportunity to address you, our elected Council Members, in firm support of Resolution 1230, which seeks to declare the City Council's support for its nearly 1 million Muslims living in NYC. I extend my sincerest gratitude to Councilman Miller, as the main sponsor of the resolution, and to each of those members who quickly joined him in support of this cause. I also ask that each of you work with an unwavering dedication to getting this resolution passed swiftly, sending a message to the world that our NYC leaders not only believe but also publicly affirm that Muslims NY'ers are deserving of the respect people of all other faiths receive.

Members of the Council, it is imperative that we voice our resolve against the misguided and often illegal actions targeting Muslims. Resolution 1230 voices our resolve against the ugliness of hatred and bigotry. It gives us an opportunity to voice our support of the beautiful array of Muslims--- black, white, tan and yellow, east and south Asian, African, Arab, Hispanic, European, young and old, first generation American and those who have been here since the inception of this nation. It affirms religious freedom as guaranteed under the 1st amendment of our country's constitution, as

well as the rights and civil liberties embedded in other amendments and subsequent federal and local legislation.

Some may inquire, why must this affirmation be publicly announced? Writer Zora Neale Hurston answered this for us when she said “If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

The NYC Muslim community will not be silent. We will not be silent through the pain of the opposition we face when there is a mosque being constructed or when an existing mosque is vandalized. CAIR reports that in 2015 alone, there were over 70 incidents targeting mosques across the nation, including damage, destruction, threats and acts of intimidation targeting our religious institutions. We will not be silent through the pain of employment discrimination in the hiring process or when legally protected accommodations to Muslims are unjustly denied. The Center for American Progress points to a 250% increase in religious discrimination cases filed with the EEOC by Muslims post 9/11, that is one quarter of all religious employment cases.

We will not stay silent when our children, an entire generation of youth, are called terrorists in their class by peers and treated as such by those who are supposed to protect them. The bullying has risen at such a rate that Muslims face twice the national average rates.

We will not stay silent when our young and old are beaten, assaulted, and even killed in the streets. Fresh in our memory are the recent cases of violence through-out the 5 boroughs, including religious clerics and women.

And as the Muslim community continues to grow and continues to amplify our voice through many forums, we turn to you, our respected NYC Council Members to raise your voice in unison with ours. For surely, when one group’s civil liberties are undermined then every group is being challenged. That is especially true here in NYC, where our strength, where our pride, where our example on how we thrive on diversity is broadcasted to the world both literally and figuratively. This is especially because the travesty of 9/11 happened here, in our hometown. Shamefully, despite Muslims also perishing in that tragedy, despite Muslims also being among the first responders that saved lives, despite Muslims also serving our country locally, nationally and internationally, some people would falsely question American Muslim loyalty. Some would have the audacity to impose on our community blatantly false suspicions for personal, political and monetary gains. As if our blood was not spilled, as if our tears were not shed, as if our hearts did not pound with sorrow and swell with compassion for all those lost of every faith and background.

Members of the NYC Council, Resolution 1230 is about speaking up. It was writer Ella Wheeler Wilcox who wrote “To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men.” Muslims are no cowards. We will practice our faith unapologetically, as permitted by our laws. We will protest every injustice perpetrated against us in the social and political spheres, in courts and at the ballot box. Our voices will not be silenced no matter what happens. The only question is whether the NYC Council will join the millions of constituents of both Muslim New Yorkers and others of conscience, in stating to the world that NYC affirms religious pluralism, and that its residents and political leaders stand together for peace and understanding.

I thank you again for this opportunity to be heard and urge you all to pass Resolution 1230