



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Congress Asked to Probe Surveillance of California Muslims

A coalition of Muslim and civil liberties organizations today called on Congress to conduct a full and impartial investigation of reports that surveillance records on Muslim communities and mosques in California were illegally obtained and disseminated by a group operating out of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

News reports have indicated that the group of military reservists and law enforcement officers at Camp Pendleton stole the data from a federal surveillance program that monitored mosques in Southern California. The group reportedly took advantage of faults in the security system at the Strategic Technical Operations Center at Camp Pendleton and passed secret files to local law enforcement agencies. Some of this information was also allegedly passed on to defense contractors in exchange for favors.

SEE: Records Detail Security Failure in Base File Theft (*San Diego Union-Tribune*).
<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/military/20080522-9999-1n22theft.html>

The California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-California), the ACLU of Southern California, the ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties, and the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California sent a letter to the Committees on the Judiciary and Oversight and Government Reform Wednesday expressing concerns over the possible civil rights violations posed by the alleged monitoring of U.S. citizens on the basis of religious affiliation.

The letter stated that "Holding the entire American Muslim community suspect not only threatens civil liberties and raises the specter of unconstitutional religious profiling, but undermines public safety by eroding that community's trust in law enforcement. The San Diego breach revealed not only flawed security, but unchecked surveillance and monitoring programs that must be subjected to Congressional oversight."

"Based on news reports, it appears that a group working out of the Camp Pendleton Marine base either conducted or had access to surveillance information about Muslim communities in Southern California," said Hussam Ayloush, executive director of CAIR Greater Los Angeles. "Who approved this surveillance and who carried it out? Who provided the oversight or legal justification for spying on law-abiding U.S. citizens and institutions? Such alleged abuses not only jeopardize innocent civilians' First Amendment rights, but also harm national security."

Edgar Hopida, public relations director of CAIR San Diego said, "These types of actions only encourage further unwarranted suspicion of the American Muslim community."

"This breach underscores the false security we have been sold," said Kevin Keenan, Executive Director of the ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties. "Our government is spying on peaceful worshippers but allowing anyone into our top security facilities. It should be frightening to every

good American that this collection of data was stolen with such ease, and that the theft was only discovered by happenstance. What else have they collected and let slip?"

More than a year ago, several organizations, including CAIR-California and the Shura Council, filed a public records request for documents relating to FBI surveillance of their lawful activities.

After the ACLU of Southern California filed a lawsuit last year seeking responses to the requests, the government produced more than 100 pages of documents for some of the plaintiffs. The suit remains in litigation.

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CONTACTS:

Rebecca Rauber, Communications Director, ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties, (619) 232-2121 ext. 26, E-mail rrauber@aclusandiego.org

Celeste Durant, Communications Director, ACLU of Southern California, (213) 977- 5252, cdurant@aclu-sc.org

Munira Syeda, CAIR-LA Communications Coordinator, (714) 776-1847 or (714) 851-4851, socal@cair.com

Edgar Hopida, CAIR San Diego Public Relations Director, (619) 913-0719 or (858) 278-4547, ehopida@cair.com