



TRADITIONAL VALUES COALITION

December 8th, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State 2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

I received your letter dated November 28th, which arrived after our phone conversation with your staff the afternoon of December 1st. Again, I re-iterate my request that representatives from Traditional Values Coalition be included as observers for your event with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on December 12-14th.

As I'm sure your office is aware, several foreign NGOs have been invited to this meeting with the U.S. Department of State and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) beyond the initial scope of the implementation of UN Resolution 16/18. In addition to these invitations, the scope and the potential impact to our First Amendment rights concerning religious liberties and free speech remain important domestic concerns within the United States.

Moreover, there are many Americans who find it alarming that these concerns regarding religious freedom are coming from Islamic nations where their record of human rights concerning women, Christians, and other religious minorities is speculative at best.

In July 2011, the following comments were given in Istanbul, Turkey to members of the OIC regarding religious speech and the methods of "peer pressure and shaming" to quell disagreeable speech in the United States:

I want to applaud the Organization of Islamic Conference and the European Union for helping pass Resolution 16/18 at the Human Rights Council. I was complimenting the secretary general on the OIC team in Geneva. I had a great team there as well. So many of you were part of that effort. And together we have begun to overcome the false divide that pits religious sensitivities against freedom of expression, and we are pursuing a new approach based on concrete steps to fight intolerance wherever it occurs. Under this resolution, the international community is taking a strong stand for freedom of expression and worship, and against discrimination and violence based upon religion or belief.

These are fundamental freedoms that belong to all people in all places, and they are certainly essential to democracy. But as the secretary general just outlined, we now need to move to implementation. *The resolution calls upon states to protect freedom of religion, to counter offensive expression through education, interfaith dialogue, and public debate, and to prohibit discrimination, profiling, and hate crimes, but not to criminalize speech unless there is an incitement to imminent violence.* We will be looking to all countries to hold themselves accountable and to join us in reporting to the UN's Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights on their progress in taking these steps.

For our part, I have asked our Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook, to spearhead our implementation efforts. And to build on the momentum from today's meeting, later this year the United States intends to invite relevant experts from around the world to the first of what we hope will be a series of meetings to discuss best practices, exchange ideas, and keep us moving forward beyond the polarizing debates of the past; to build those muscles of respect and empathy and tolerance that the secretary general referenced. It is essential that we advance this new consensus and strengthen it, both at the United Nations and beyond, in order to avoid a return to the old patterns of division.

The Human Rights Council has given us a comprehensive framework for addressing this issue on the international level. But at the same time, we each have to work to do more to promote respect for religious differences in our own countries. In the United States, I will admit, there are people who still feel vulnerable or marginalized as a result of their religious beliefs. And *we have seen how the incendiary actions of just a very few people, a handful in a country of nearly 300 million, can create wide ripples of intolerance*. We also understand that, for 235 years, freedom of expression has been a universal right at the core of our democracy. So we are focused on promoting interfaith education and collaboration, enforcing antidiscrimination laws, protecting the rights of all people to worship as they choose, and to *use some old-fashioned techniques of peer pressure and shaming*, so that people don't feel that they have the support to do what we abhor.¹

Such a characterization of free speech concerning Islam with such an elastic term as "incitement to imminent violence" is ultimately dependent upon the feelings and actions of those *perceiving offense* rather than the actual content of the speech itself. This phrase itself is already being used in the United States to silence those who have concerns with Islamic shariah law.

As dignitaries such as Pope Benedict XVI learned to his own horror after his now-famous Regensburg Lecutre in 2006², mere theological speculation on the inherent link between violence and Islam -- a conversation that is centuries old -- leads to politically motivated re-actions designed to turn legitimate points of conversation into a hate crime. Under this paradigm, Pope Benedict XVI contributed to "the incitement of imminent violence" and is guilty of hate speech. This is not the American understanding of either free speech or religious liberty.

These sensitivities and concerns require the involvement of domestic observers from within the United States. TVC asks for a timely response to this request to attend this meeting by noon Friday, December 9th, 2012. Should this request not be honored, Traditional Values Coalition can only be lead to the conclusion that the objective of this meeting is not religious liberty and toleration, but rather a concert designed to chill, contain, and curb religious liberties and free speech.

Sincerely,



Andrea Lafferty
President
Traditional Values Coalition

¹ <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/07/168636.htm>

² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html