

JULY 18, 2012

No congregation should have its right of religious liberty curtailed solely because some of its neighbors disapprove of its religious beliefs.

In 2010, the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro sought to build a new mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where they could worship God in peace on their own property. Although it made every effort to reach out to its neighbors in friendship, the congregation was subjected to a campaign of protest and violence, including vandalism, a bomb threat, and even arson.

This campaign of violence was accompanied by a legal campaign in which the congregation's opponents claimed that the Muslim religion—one of the world's largest—was not really a religion, but a political movement seeking to impose "sharia" on the United States. As a result of the legal battle, a local judge has issued a ruling forbidding the congregation from entering its newly completed building. After years of following both the letter and the spirit of the law, the congregation is again seeking permission to use its building—this time in the hope that it will be permitted to do so before the start of Ramadan.

We, the undersigned, represent a diverse array of religious beliefs and have disagreements on a wide variety of theological, political, and social matters. But we are united in supporting the right of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro to gather in peace on their own property for their celebration of Ramadan.

We deplore the vandalism, arson, and bomb threats directed at this congregation. No congregation of any religion should ever be the target of violence for any reason.

We recognize that the word "sharia" can be used in a wide variety of ways and can be the subject of vigorous debate within our political and religious communities. But shrill, sensationalist rhetoric about "sharia" should not be used as a pretext to deprive Muslims of their right under the United States Constitution to the free exercise of religion.

We emphatically support the right of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro—on an equal basis with any other type of religious congregation—to build a house of worship in the City of Murfreesboro and to use its own property for religious exercise. We repeat: No congregation should have its right of religious liberty curtailed solely because some of its neighbors disapprove of its religious beliefs. Mosques must be respected and honored just as churches must be respected and honored.

Finally, we call on all Americans of good will to join us in supporting the religious liberty of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro. When the liberty of one faith is abridged, the liberty of all faiths—and all citizens—is threatened. Therefore, we stand united in our dedication to the First Amendment, the Constitution, and the inalienable right of religious liberty for all.

Sincerely,

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