

September 21, 2011

Stephanie Douglas
Special Agent in Charge
FBI San Francisco
450 Golden Gate Ave., 13th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102

Special Agent in Charge Douglas,

We, the undersigned San Francisco Bay Area organizations, write to you with great concern regarding the use of inaccurate and offensive materials to train agents about Islam, Muslims, and counter-terrorism. A recent article by *Wired.com* featuring leaked FBI documents revealed that agents were taught in a training that the Prophet Muhammad was a “cult leader” and that the religious obligation in Islam to give charity is nothing more than a “funding mechanism for combat.”¹ We are extremely concerned about the potential impact of this training and similarly inaccurate and offensive training materials on San Francisco Bay Area FBI agents and the communities they serve.

The official FBI response further augmented our apprehension. After this report was made public, the FBI claimed this training session was used “one time only” and the trainer’s services ended in April 2011. However, earlier this week *Wired.com* released another report showing the same trainer presenting at another FBI event in New York, with no discernable improvement in content.² As you know, the trainer in question is William Gawthrop, who is employed by the FBI as an intelligence analyst. Before being hired by the FBI, Gawthrop stated that he believes “Muhammad’s mindset is a source for terrorism.”³ It is important to note that Gawthrop does not have a background or any credentials in the study of Islam nor does he have experience interacting with Muslim communities in the US. As such, he is patently unqualified to present on the subject.

We fear, however, that Gawthrop’s training may be only the tip of the iceberg. Freedom of Information Act requests made locally by the Asian Law Caucus, American Civil Liberties Union-Northern California and San Francisco Bay Guardian have resulted in the discovery of additional inaccurate and offensive training materials authored and used by FBI agents. One PowerPoint training, for example, stated that Islam “transforms [a] country’s culture into 7th century Arabian ways.”⁴ Another textbook claims that regular visits to the Mosque for prayer and sympathy for the plight of Palestinians are somehow indicative of militancy. These teachings, in addition to being inaccurate and prejudicial, have the potential to impede the First Amendment protections guaranteed by our Constitution.

¹ Spencer Ackerman. FBI Teaches Agents: ‘Mainstream’ Muslims Are ‘Violent, Radical’
<http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/fbi-muslims-radical/all/1>

² Spencer Ackerman & Noah Shachtman, *FBI Trainer Says Forget ‘Irrelevant’ Al-Qaeda, Target Islam*

³ Id. Page 2

⁴ Spencer Ackerman, *FBI ‘Islam 101’ Guide Depicted Muslims as 7th-Century Simpletons*, *wired.com*, July 27, 2011. Available at: <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/07/fbi-islam-101-guide/#more-53126>

The US Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs has expressed concern about anti-Muslim training in a letter demanding action at the FBI, and acknowledging the impact this training has on local offices. The letter states in part:

"State and local law enforcement often have little to no guidance from the federal government on what counter-terrorism training should entail... [and] The result has often been cases of trainers spewing inaccurate or even bigoted information to state and local law enforcement personnel, stigmatizing Muslim-Americans generally, and in effect, lending support to the false narrative that we are 'at war' with Islam."⁵

Just as good trainings result in good investigations, biased trainings will inevitably result in biased investigations. The number of instances in which the FBI has used inaccurate training materials about Muslims which mislead agents has moved us to contact you. Note that these concerns are not simply abstract questions about training materials, but rather are reflective of the experiences of the communities and clients we serve. We continue to hear complaints from dozens of law abiding Bay Area residents that FBI agents are asking questions about their religious and political beliefs in interviews. As such, we are requesting the following:

1. An accounting of how many, if any, FBI agents currently assigned to the San Francisco Bay Area attended trainings conducted by Gawthrop? If any did, what specific steps have been taken to review and ensure their work has not been affected by the inaccurate and anti-Muslim information they received? Will they receive any re-training to counteract the messaging the FBI has stated it rejects?
2. How many, if any, of the state and local officers assigned to the local Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) have received training at Quantico? Have any of them received any of the training mentioned in the *Wired* stories and/or documents released to the ALC and ACLU? If any were exposed to this material, which local or state agencies do they represent and what steps is your office taking to inform local elected and law enforcement officials that their personnel have received inappropriate training from the FBI?
3. Given these revelations raise additional questions about whether local officers assigned to the JTTF are reflecting local community values in their work, will you publicly commit to ensuring – as federal officials did in Portland – that local agencies can participate in the JTTF under their own policies and oversight rather than under the restrictive FBI Memorandum of Understanding? If not, will you publicly explain why this solution works for Portland but not for the Bay Area?

⁵ Ryan Reilly, *Lieberman, Collins: If Obama Won't Do Something About Anti-Muslim Counterterrorism Training, We Will*, Talking Points Memo [TPM], September 12, 2011. Available at: http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2011/09/lieberman_collins_to_obama_if_you_dont_do_something_about_anti-muslim_counterterrorism_training_we_will.php

Biased trainings waste resources and reflect poorly on the agency as a whole. In order to protect our national security, law enforcement officers should be given the proper tools to assess situations with clear-headed objectivity. These biased trainings create a climate of hysteria, confusion and misunderstanding, which distracts law enforcement from keeping our nation safe. We appreciate your office's efforts to protect our country and look forward to a timely response to our questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union, Northern California
Asian Law Caucus
Council on American-Islamic Relations, San Francisco Bay Area

CC: Melinda Haag, US Attorney for the Northern District of California
San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
SFPD Police Chief Suhr