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## Media Campaign in US to Dispel Islamophobia

Javid Hassan, Arab News

RIYADH, 21 June 2006 — A survey conducted by Cornell University recently found that around half of Americans have a negative view of Islam and would like the US government to curtail the political activity of Muslims in the US.

Addressing a press conference at the headquarters of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Paul Findley, a former US Congressman, said that the cancer of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiments was spreading in American society and requires corrective measures to stamp out this malaise.



Paul Findley, a former US Congressman, addressing a press conference in Riyadh on Tuesday. (AN photo)

It was also announced that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) would be launching a massive \$50 million media campaign involving television, radio and newspapers as part of its five-year program to create a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in the US.

Referring to the anti-Islamic sentiments in the US, Findley said that the campaign was being spearheaded by a tiny but influential section of society, including some politicians, academics and opinion-makers.

Findley commended CAIR's initiative that he said could go a long way toward improving the image of Islam and Muslims, which has been badly dented in part due to the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

Speaking on his interaction with the US media, Ibrahim Cooper, spokesman for CAIR, said that his own feeling was that American journalists are receptive to issues affecting Muslims. For this reason, nearly all American newspapers, print or online, refrained from reproducing the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that were at the center of a controversy earlier this year. He said CAIR took advantage of the issue by distributing DVDs free of charge, bringing out a book on the Prophet, and launching an awareness campaign.

"All of this had a positive impact," said Cooper.

Parvez Ahmed, CAIR chairman, spoke on what he described as the most "vicious attacks on Islam" he has ever seen in recent years, adding that the campaign is being orchestrated by a minority fringe element in the US seeking to drive a xenophobic wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims.

He said a minority of Muslim extremists helps perpetuate anti-Muslim sentiment in the US, but that it is wrong for Americans to rush to conclusions based on these groups that have distorted or misinterpreted Qur'anic text. He compared it to making judgments on Christians based on the Crusades.

Elaborating on the CAIR campaign to dispel misunderstandings of Islam and Muslims, Nihad Awad, CAIR executive director, said that his group proposes to spend \$10 million annually for five years in a media campaign.

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He said that CAIR would also recruit volunteers and produce educational material as part of its initiative.

“We are planning to meet Prince Alwaleed ibn Talal for his financial support to our project. He has been generous in the past,” he added.



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