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CAIR-LA Calls FBI Questioning of Muslim Men 'Outrageous'

'Henderson 7' previously detained for praying while traveling through Nevada

LOS ANGELES, June 21 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Greater Los Angeles Area chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-LA) today called the FBI's early morning questioning of five Southern California Muslim men last week "outrageous" and is seeking answers as to why the men were questioned in the absence of any indication that they were engaged in criminal activity.

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The men questioned last Thursday morning by the FBI were among seven detained for "suspicious behavior" last December by police in Henderson, Nev., after they prayed in a commercial parking lot during a stop on a road trip.

SEE: Calif. Muslims Detained for Praying in Nevada

<http://tinyurl.com/henderson7>

One of the men questioned by FBI agents for an hour on Thursday in his Los Angeles apartment said the agents produced a book containing information on war tactics, titled "Afghanistan." They allegedly told the man that Henderson police officers had found and taken photos of two of these books during the December search of the men's vehicle. FBI agents asked the individual whether he had any knowledge of the books, and reportedly told him they were there to follow up on the books.

However, the men say there were no such books in the vehicle. Also, an officer with the Henderson Police Department told CAIR-LA that the department has no information that such books were photographed or taken by officers during the December stop.

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[The Henderson Police Department initiated an internal investigation into the December incident in response to a misconduct complaint filed by CAIR-LA. That investigation is ongoing.]

FBI agents further questioned the young man, a U.S. Army veteran, about his trip through Henderson and about the various stops made during the trip. He was allegedly asked if he and his friends had any weapons when they went hiking. The agents also asked who led the seven men on the road trip, who of his six travel companions he would consult for religious advice and if he became religious before or after active military duty.

Toward the end of the questioning, the FBI agents allegedly told the man they were looking for people with military backgrounds who speak Arabic because they would be an asset for the FBI.

CAIR Alert: Know Your Rights when Visited by FBI/JTTF Agents

<http://tinyurl.com/cairknowyourrights>

"It is outrageous that these young men continue to face government scrutiny for engaging in protected First Amendment activity," said CAIR-LA Staff Attorney and Deputy Executive Director Ameena Mirza Qazi. "They were not 'suspicious' when they prayed in a parking lot six months ago, and they're not suspicious now. It's worrisome that our intelligence resources are being expended to investigate what seems to be manufactured evidence or to assume a nefarious motive for the normal American activity of a bunch of guys going on a road trip."

"This seems to be yet another example of faith moving from a personal choice to probable cause," said CAIR's National Legislative Director Corey Saylor. "The young men's simple act of worship -- something most Americans engage in routinely -- has now led to questioning by both local and federal law enforcement agents."

In the past several years, Muslim community members have complained of FBI harassment, harsh interrogation and coercive tactics, and informant recruitment through FBI intimidation.

Early last week, CAIR released a letter it sent to Attorney General Eric Holder calling for the return to the United States of American Muslim citizens barred from returning home from trips overseas and subjected to FBI pressure tactics that are being called a form of "extraordinary rendition."

SEE: CAIR Asks AG Holder to Help Muslim Citizens Barred from U.S.

<http://tinyurl.com/265nhuy>

CAIR chapters across the country are noting a growing trend of individuals who receive unwarranted attention from law enforcement or federal agencies in one instance, and then face repeated issues in immigration, traveling or additional FBI or Joint Terrorism Task Force visits.

Several of the "Henderson 7" say they have faced travel issues, such as one of the men who was subjected to a secondary search for the first time when returning from India, and another who was detained and questioned for an hour and a half at the Canadian border earlier this year. Another one of the young men reports that his wife's green card interview was abruptly cancelled in March, and that they have not heard from immigration authorities since that time.

CAIR-LA noted a pattern of cross-agency interaction in the adjudication of immigration applications and filed a Freedom of



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Information Act (FOIA) request last Wednesday with other civil rights groups to uncover such practices in the naturalization process.

SEE: CAIR-LA, ACLU/SC and NILC File FOIA Request to Uncover Racial and Religious Profiling

<http://tinyurl.com/immigrationbias>

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

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