



Statement on Planned Quran Burning and Other Acts of Islamophobia
Greg Coleridge, Director, Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
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The Northeast Ohio AFSC stands in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters in support of love, understanding, and respect. Our Quaker roots teach us to embrace knowledge, compassion and truth. When Quakerism was first established, those who practiced it were persecuted. Yet the response by Friends was not hatred, but love and nonviolence. Eventually, people began to see the wisdom of tolerating and respecting other faiths. That same wisdom is needed today.

The tragedy of 9/11 provided two opportunities for our country – the same opportunities that any person possesses in response to a sudden personal tragedy: to lash out in fear, blame and retaliation or to reach out in love seeking understanding and unity.

Our nation chose the path of fear and violence – attacking a people (Afghans) that had nothing to do with those responsible for the 9/11 attacks and later a country (Iraq) that once again had nothing to do for the tragic attacks. Such fear and retaliatory violence resulted not in greater strength and security but in staggering human, economic, political, social and environmental costs that continue.

We hear the frustration and pain in the hearts of those who continue to mourn their loss on September 11th and feel deep uncertainties and distrust toward those they feel are responsible. As believers in the dignity and worth of every human being, we resist the temptation to label those people as racists, nationalists or evil.

At the same time, we call upon those who fear Muslims to build bridges of respect and not walls of intolerance. Burning sacred religious texts is not respectful. Making sweeping categorical declarations about an entire religion and those who practice it as terrorists is not respectful. In our current times, everything we do should be measured against the goal of escalating love and unity rather than hostilities and violence.

This current controversy has sadly inflamed the worst in our human nature, creating diversions and divisions where there should be unity, promoting definitive manifestos where there should be thoughtful civil discourse, and contributing to anti-Islam demagoguery for political gain where there should be thoughtful reflections to avoid political mistakes of the past.

Let our gathering together in public support of our Muslim brothers and sisters be a lasting good of this controversy – a testament that there is a better side in our human nature: one that is directed at loving all people, including those on the other side of this issue, yet one that comes together in support and in defense of people who are persecuted – of any religion, race, nationality, income or creed.

Peace.