

2015

END-OF-YEAR NEWSLETTER



CAIR

PHILADELPHIA



Jacob Bender, CAIR-Philadelphia Executive Director, speaking at Muslim Capitol Day in Harrisburg on Oct. 20th.

A Year of Sadness and Service

A Letter from Osama Al-Qasem
President, CAIR-Philadelphia

Dear Friends and Supporters:

As-salamu alaykum! As 2015 draws to a close, I would like to review some recent events with you, especially as this has been a difficult year for American Muslims.

Consider the following: In January, extremists attacked the offices of the “Charlie Hebdo” magazine in Paris. In spring, American bigots plastered Islamophobic ads on SEPTA buses. In the summer, leading presidential candidates competed with one another in anti-Muslim rhetoric, launching the most public attack on an American minority in living memory. And then in autumn, first in Paris and Beirut, the blasphemous violence of ISIS unleashed a global wave of Islamophobia. And throughout it all, a flood of Syrian refugees flee from their destroyed native land.

Yet, in spite of all the powerful forces of hate aligned against the Muslim community, CAIR-Philadelphia continued to develop creative and innovative programs with which to serve the Muslim population of the Dela-

ware Valley, based upon CAIR’s 4-point mission statement:

- ◆ Providing free legal services to Muslims facing employment discrimination or government infringement of their civil rights;
- ◆ Empowering our community through innovative workshops and civic engagement;
- ◆ Forging coalitions to directly confront anti-Muslim propaganda; and
- ◆ Engaging the media to correct the manifold distortions of Islam in the press and online.

Translating our goals into action, our talented executive director Jacob Bender was interviewed numerous times on TV and the radio, and had many articles and letters-to-the-editor published in newspapers and magazines to challenge widespread Islamophobia in the media.

Our dedicated staff attorney Ryan Houldin continued to litigate through the Federal Court on behalf of the Bensalem community in their quest to build a mosque. Ryan also continued to work for our brothers and sisters when they are denied any of their rights in private or public work places or correctional facilities.

CAIR takes a multidimensional approach

to empowering American Muslims, utilizing both the legal system and community-organizing methodology to achieving its goals. Whether it was the “Islam 101” workshops that helped Jews and Christians learn about our faith, or Muslim Capitol Day (above photo), or the numerous interfaith meetings that we helped initiate and organize, CAIR is making a difference in our lives and in the quality of life of the Philadelphia Muslim community.

This progress cannot be achieved, however, without your continued support, which I ask for now.

I wish you and your families a happy and healthy New Year, and on behalf of CAIR-Philadelphia’s Staff and Executive Committee, I thank you in advance for your generous donation.

JazakAllahu khair,

Osama Al-Qasem

Osama Al-Qasem

Enhancing the Understanding of Islam

Sharing Ramadan

During this year's Muslim Holy Month, CAIR-Philadelphia continued its annual tradition of "Sharing Ramadan" events throughout the region, offering opportunities for people of all faiths to experience the Muslim month of fasting.

We also sponsored an Interfaith Iftar at the Friends Center whose participants included numerous Christians and Jews. One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of an award to peace activist Rabbi Arthur Waskow. (Photo, right)



Iftekhar Hussain, CAIR-Philadelphia VP, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow at our Interfaith Iftar.

"Islam 101"

Jacob Bender and Executive Committee members Iftekhar Hussain and Asheq Fazlullah presented numerous "Introduction to Islam" workshops to Christian and Jews groups throughout the Delaware Valley.



Ninth Annual Banquet

Nearly 700 supporters and friends of CAIR-Philadelphia gathered in the elegant ballroom of the Springfield Country Club on March 7th for CAIR-Philadelphia's 9th Annual Banquet.



Scenes from the Banquet.

The program began with a beautiful Qur'an recitation by Dr. Imtiaz Chaudhry. Next came a stirring dramatic reading by CAIR staff and friends, accompanied by video projections and music, which illuminated the history of Muslim Philadelphia, as well as explaining the work and resources that CAIR-Philadelphia provides to Delaware Valley Muslims and the general community.

The winners of our student essay contest were announced and given their prizes.

Finally, our keynote speaker, Imam Suhaib Webb, inspired all those present with his charismatic and humorous melding of traditional Islam and popular culture.

Protecting Civil Liberties

By Ryan Houldin

Staff Attorney, CAIR-Philadelphia

I was given the great opportunity to become CAIR-Philadelphia's staff attorney in June of this year. It has been a gift to help empower a community that has been so unjustly targeted by portions of the press, pundits, and politicians.

For the past six months, I have helped protect and restore the civil rights of numerous Muslims in the Philadelphia area. One of the most common issues we work on is addressing discrimination in the workplace. I have represented several persons in employment discrimination cases, such as:

- ◆ Securing the right of a Muslim woman to wear an ankle-length skirt as part of her uniform at the Philadelphia Parking Authority;
- ◆ Enabling a Muslim teenager to wear a *hijab* while working at Chuck E. Cheese's;
- ◆ Helping a Muslim woman obtain time off from work to make *hajj*;
- ◆ Ensuring that a Muslim woman adhered to the mandates of Ramadan while taking medication; and
- ◆ Filing a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on behalf of a Muslim employee who was fired for requesting a religious accommodation.

Furthermore, there are several cases that are in active litigation in an effort to defend the rights of Muslims, which include:

- ◆ Suing Bensalem Township for preventing the construction of a *masjid*;
- ◆ Filing a claim against the U.S. Government for delaying a Syrian national's green card application; and

- ◆ Suing the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for not allowing Muslim kitchen workers to perform *salat*.



Ryan Houldin, CAIR-Philadelphia staff attorney, explains a point of law to a prospective client.

In addition to providing legal support to victims of discrimination, I had the pleasure of providing legal training to empower the Muslim community to confidently assert their rights and fight back against discrimination and Islamophobia. I also gave a presentation about the troubling tactics utilized by FBI-paid informants to coerce Muslims into committing acts of terrorism.

SAVE THE DATE !!

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2016

CAIR- 10TH

PHILADELPHIA

Anniversary Banquet

Dean Obeidallah / Keynote

Springfield Country Club

Empowering the American Muslim Community



Jason Dawkins, Pennsylvania State Rep., speaking at CAIR's Muslim Capitol Day in Harrisburg.

Muslim Capitol Day

One of the year's highlights was Muslim Capitol Day. On Oct. 20th, over 100 community members and supporters from around Pennsylvania travelled to Harrisburg. Meeting with our elected representatives, we conveyed to them the Muslim community's concerns on a number of issues, including the spread of Islamophobia into mainstream politics, supporting the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Pennsylvania, raising the minimum wage, and the climate crisis.

A press conference including a diverse list of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish speakers, concluded the day. The speakers included Jacob Bender; Iftekhar Hussain; State Rep. Jason Dawkins; Tiffany Chang from the Governor's Office; Rabiya Khan, local Muslim activist; Ann Van Dyke, Community Responders Network; Rev. Sandra Strauss, Harrisburg Council of Churches; and Rabbi Linda Holtzman, Tikkun Olam Havurah.

The event was proof that in spite of the increase in Islamophobia, the American Muslim community has many friends among Jewish, Christian, and interfaith leaders and their organizations.

The Two-Eids Campaign

CAIR-Philadelphia has joined the Philadelphia Eid Coalition and is mobilizing support for the campaign to have the City recognize the Two Eids as official municipal and school holidays.

A few cities with large Muslim populations, such as New York City, have already taken this step. With a Muslim population estimated at over 200,000, CAIR believes the City of Philadelphia should be next in line.

For more information on the Two-Eids Campaign, visit <http://www.phillyeid.org/>.



Youth Symposium

Executive Committee member Katera Moore, with Youseff Kromah, coordinated the "Do it for the Deen" Youth Symposium in May. The teenage participants were encouraged to reflect on their Muslim identity and determine how they can productively engage with the broader community to become agents of change.

The symposium focused on self awareness, goal setting, service, and identifying the qualities of a good leader.

"Know Your Rights"

Ryan Houldin, Iftekhar Hussain and Asheq Fazlullah presented numerous "Know Your Rights" and "Anti-Bullying" workshops to both youth and adult groups throughout the Delaware Valley. These are invaluable learning experiences for all ages. Contact the CAIR office to schedule a workshop.

Delaware Valley Leadership Meetings

In May and October, CAIR-Philadelphia organized meetings of the Delaware Valley Muslim Leadership Forums. In attendance were imams, board members, executive committee members of mosques and Muslim organizations, as well as business owners in the Greater Delaware Valley. The purpose of the meetings is to establish better understanding and coordination between all segments of the Delaware Valley Muslim community.

Topics presented and discussed included: Recognition of Eid Holidays in Philadelphia; Equal Representation of American Muslim Women; Day of Dignity; *Da'wah* and New Muslim Initiatives; and Creation of the Philadelphia Muslim Health & Social Services Alliance.

If you are a community leader and wish to join future meetings, please contact us.



Participants in a recent meeting of the Greater Delaware Muslim Leadership Forum.

Building Interfaith and Multicultural Coalitions

Anti-Muslim Bus Ads

Last year, as part of its national anti-Muslim campaign, the Islamophobic group “Stop the Islamization of America” (SOIA) purchased advertising space on SEPTA buses to display ads calling opponents of Israeli policy “savages” and claiming that the Qur’an is anti-Semitic.

Our press release on the issue stated: “These ads are despicable and false, but fall under First Amendment protection. The people behind these ads are part of a well-funded nation-wide Islamophobic campaign pushing a clearly hate-inspired message on the citizens of our city.”

When a U.S. District Court ruled that SEPTA could not refuse to place the ads, CAIR immediately began working with an interfaith coalition to push back against these ads. The coalition’s efforts included a press conference with Mayor Nutter and a public educational campaign about Islam, including the leafleting of SEPTA riders.

SEPTA Assistant General Manager Francis Kelly wrote to our office saying, “The efforts of the Philadelphia Chapter of CAIR to educate and engage the public were instrumental in negating the impact of the ads ... CAIR’s message of inclusion and tolerance was and is a powerful antidote to those whose only goal is to disparage.”



Mayor Michael Nutter condemning the anti-Muslim ads on SEPTA buses, speaking at a press conference and rally in Love Park.

Interfaith Iftar Dinner

In June, CAIR-Philadelphia held its First Annual Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinner, attended by over 100 of Philadelphia’s leading Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious leaders for an evening of food, friendship, and spiritual inspiration. Highlights included presentations by Shaikh Yahya Rhodus of the Al-Maqasid Institute, Rabbi Yael Levy of Mishkan Shalom Synagogue, and Rev. David Tatgenhorst of the St. Luke United Methodist Church.



Shaikh Yahya Rhodus addressing CAIR’s First Annual Interfaith Iftar Dinner.

Philadelphia Peacewalk

As in years past, CAIR was a co-sponsor of the 2015 Philadelphia Interfaith Walk for Peace and Reconciliation, which annually brings many of the City’s religious and ethnic communities together in support of nonviolence (photo, below). Next year’s Walk will conclude at Masjid-ullah, Center for Human Excellence.



Media Engagement

In 2015, CAIR-Philadelphia had unprecedented coverage in the media, reaching tens of thousands of people with its message of Islamic peace and pluralism. Media organizations covering our activities included The Philadelphia Inquirer, Philly.com, The New York Times, Philadelphia City News, Bucks County Courier, WURD Radio, NPR, CBS Radio, ABC-6 TV, and NBC-10 TV.

Executive Director Jacob Bender was interviewed over a dozen times in the above-listed media outlets.



For more information about CAIR-Philadelphia, visit: pa.cair.com.

CAIR-Philadelphia’s 2015 End-of-Year Newsletter was written by Leena Jaffer and Jacob Bender, and designed by Jacob.

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