Muslim Coalition Releases Critique of NYPD Radicalization Report

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Coalition Offers Recommendations for Improving NYPD-Muslim Relations (New York City - 11/20/08) -- During a press conference held this morning on the steps of New York City Hall, the New York Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition released its critique of a controversial report from the New York Police Department about the threat of domestic radicalization. Made up of prominent Muslim advocates, attorneys, and community leaders, the Coalition called on the NYPD to update its report on "Radicalization in the West: The Home Grown Threat" to address its civil liberties implications. The group also released a set of recommendations intended to increase cooperation and trust between the NYPD and Muslim community. MACLC was created after national and local Muslim American leaders agreed that the release of the NYPD 2007 report, if implemented, would entail a serious breach of First Amendment rights to religious freedom. The controversial report, which falsely alludes to the susceptibility of all Muslim males aged 16 to 45 to terrorist ideology, is methodologically weak and more confusing than illuminating. While not intending to profile Islam and Muslims, the report does exactly that. "Unquestionably, all criminal acts of violence are unacceptable and prevention requires a well-researched report to guide responsible policing," said Faiza Ali, CAIR-NY Community Affairs Director and co-author of MACLC's critique. "The study of violent extremism, however, should decouple religion from terror to safeguard civil liberties on free speech and equal protection grounds as a matter of strong public policy." The critique addresses MACLC concerns over the report, and puts forward suggestions for how the NYPD can proceed in order to create sound policies that advance the security and safety for all Americans, as well as build better relations between police and the communities it serves. "Muslim Americans need an independent, organized voice to proactively respond to the religious and racial profiling that has come under the umbrella of post-9/11 counterterrorism policies," said Sarah Sayeed, MACLC critique co-author and representative from the Muslim Consultative Network/Women in Islam, Inc. Members of MACLC stressed that engagement and consultation with community-based organizations. Protecting civil liberties and preventing racial, religious, and ethnic profiling/bias are also essential and non-negotiable components of effective security policy. "U.S. domestic security does not have to come at the cost of Muslim American marginalization," said Naoma Nagahawatte, MPAC New York City Director, and MACLC critique contributor. Civil liberties groups across New York joined the coalition, signing on to the critique and recommendations which were submitted to Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly. "Accepting the [NYPD] report's conclusions will lead to increased levels of religious and racial profiling in violation of constitutional norms," said Ellen Fisher, researcher with the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU's Law School. "Producing an effective response to the report is all the more urgent because the danger it poses is not confined to New York." Sundeep Singh, Community Organizer with the Sikh Coalition added, "We are concerned that the NYPD's report will only lead to more unjust profiling of Muslims and Arabs in New York and perpetuate the myth that all Muslims are suspected terrorists. This is of great concern to the Sikh community, as Sikhs are commonly mistaken to be Muslims and/or Arabs. We stand with the Muslim community against racial and religious profiling and urge the NYPD to cease this dangerous practice." Created in 2007, MACLC exists for the purpose of articulating a New York-specific Muslim perspective on law enforcement, homeland security, civil liberties, and counterterrorism decision-making. MACLCs vision is to promote a dialogue with law enforcement and the American Muslim community that upholds local and national security interests without infringing on civil liberties.