



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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JACL Statement on the New York City Islamic Community Center and Mosque

As the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) strives to ensure that civil liberties are upheld for Asian Americans and others who are targeted by acts of injustice and intolerance. We support the fundamental right to build an Islamic cultural center near the site of the World Trade Center in New York City as an expression of religious tolerance.

The JACL recognizes that Muslims have prayed in this space throughout the past year in exercise of their fundamental freedoms to assemble and practice religion. We also believe the strongest expression of American values that promote tolerance and as outlined in our constitution must be made when difficult and emotional choices confront us.

As a community that has faced tragic episodes of injustice, Japanese Americans understand the glare of intolerance. In the early twentieth century, establishment of Japanese American Christian Churches faced opposition in Los Angeles. As recently reported in the New York Times, in 1944, New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia opposed the opening of a hostel for Japanese Americans who sought to resettle from the World War II detention camps to live and work in New York City. The hostel was in a location sensitive to many Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor – roughly a mile from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. After the ACLU, churches and other organizations began to voice support for the hostel, it opened and by the end of the war it housed about 35 of approximately 2,000 who resettled in the city.

The JACL supports the rights of Muslims to practice Islam and of the Cordoba Initiative to build on the location it has selected which has been approved by city planning officials. In the face of war and the tragedy of September 11th it is too easy to place blame on others and allow intolerance to prevail. We must do better than to leave Muslim Americans with the impression that intolerance has no definite end. We must begin by not re-interpreting our emotions over September 11th but instead, by affirming the ideals that have defined our democracy.

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