

FBSAC November 29, 2022- Meeting Minutes

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Faith-Based Security Advisory Council Meeting
Tuesday, November 29, 2022
Meeting Minutes
10:00 AM – 10:30 AM EST

The open session of the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council (FBSAC) meeting was convened on November 29th, 2022, from 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m Eastern Time. The meeting was open to members of the public under the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), P.L. 92-463 and 5 U.S.C.§ 552b.

The following individuals attended the meeting:

FBSAC Members

Kiran Kaur Gill, Chair
Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, Vice Chair
Chandru Acharya
Imam Mohamed Hag Magid
Salam Al-Marayati
Deputy Chief Tracie Baker
Kimberly Burgo
Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune
Rabbi Moshe Hauer
Hyepin Im
Curtis Jones
Alberto Martinez
Michael Masters
Sheriff Garry McFadden
Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Todd Richins
Mayya Saab
Rev. Gabriel Salguero
Rev. Al Sharpton
Rev. Naomi Washington-Leapheart
April Wood

DHS Participants

Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Brenda Abdelall, Assistant Secretary Office of Partnership and Engagement
Sameer Hossain, Designated Federal Officer, FBSAC
Nicole Rosich, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, FBSAC
Mike Miron, Committee Management Officer

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Nicole Rosich: Good morning, everyone. This meeting of the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council is convened pursuant to a notice that appeared in the Federal Register Tuesday November 15, 2022. For the visibility of everyone on this call this meeting is being recorded for record keeping purposes but will not be disseminated as stated in the Federal Register notice. Today's session will be partially closed. My name is Nicole Rosich and I serve as Senior Director of NGO Engagement. I will be facilitating today's meeting of the Faith Based Security Advisory Council or FBSAC. I want to thank FBSAC members, members of the public, and our government colleagues for joining today's public meeting. Executive summary and meeting minutes for the open portion of today's meeting will be posted on the DHS FBSAC website within 90 days of today's meeting. For more details you can email FBSAC@DHS.gov For the record we have twenty representative FBSAC members participating in today's meeting. During this meeting members of the public are participating in a webinar as attendees. Accordingly, members of the public have access to see and hear the meeting, but their video cameras and microphones will remain inactive for the duration of today's meeting. It is my pleasure to now introduce the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Partnership and Engagement Brenda Abdelall who will share her opening remarks then introduce the Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas. Brenda?

Brenda Abdelall: Thank you Nicole and thank you to everyone all of our FBSAC members and members of the public for joining today. I want to start by thanking our co-chairs of the FBSAC council for their leadership as well and thanks Sameer Hossain and Nicole Rosich from the office of Partnership and Engagement for their critically important work especially during a time in which we continue to hear from faith-based communities nationwide of the importance of this Council, as well as the value and need to continue to share resources, to equip and protect communities nationwide. And with that. I'll turn it over to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to share the taskings for the Council today.

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas: Thanks so much, Brenda. Thank you for joining us this morning, and of course for your willingness to serve on this important Council. You know what, in reflecting on the work ahead, I realized that the importance of your participation is for a troubling reason and also a promising reason. The troubling one is that we must recognize as I'm sure all of you do, that violence born of ideologies of hate is only increasing in our country. The faith-based communities are increasingly targets of those who seek to spread hate and act on hate in violent ways. And so, this Council is very very important in the face of that reality. It is also very important because all of you, as leaders are sources of strength and means of strengthening the bonds between our Department officials everywhere and the communities that we serve. I have said repeatedly, since taking office that the Department of Homeland Security is fundamentally a department of partnerships and you are critical leaders with whom we partner to reach communities of all faiths, of all backgrounds to build a safer more secure America. And so, in the midst of the increased threat, we seek increased strength from the work that you will perform on this Council. We have developed our three lines of effort to meet the reality of which I speak, as well as to really tap the potential strength that you have as esteemed leaders, and I want to mention the three of them, and then make an overarching point given what I think is the urgency of our work. The first line of effort is information sharing, and we would ask you to review and assess the efficiency and effectiveness of our, of the Department's information sharing with our faith-based partners in our faith-based communities. How ably and effectively do we disseminate and share information that is relevant that is timely, that is actionable so that your communities and you especially as leaders are equipped to prevent acts of violence from occurring in the first instance, and how to equip your congregations, your communities in making themselves safer and feeling more secure. This is something – I don't know if Michael Masters is on – but this is something that Michael and I have spoken about for many years and I know the Imam – and I don't know if the Imam is on – but we spoke about when I served as Deputy Secretary. This is not a new issue, but we're looking at new ways of meeting at the moment. Because it is,

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it is clear that the vulnerability has not diminished. The second line of effort is to look at our grant programs, our nonprofit security grant programs, our other programs and how you know what the challenges are in accessing those grant programs and how our existing resources can better meet the needs of faith-based organizations and communities. You know, I was in Dearborn, Michigan and I met with faith leaders there. There was a great level of disparity that in the ability of some communities to access our funds versus others. Some are very sophisticated, have the resources to retain grant writers and know how to navigate the grant program. Others do not. Equality of access is a core principle and sometimes we have regrettably target rich, yet resource poor elements of our faith-based community and we have to break down the barriers, simplify the process, and make it more accessible. And information sharing is one; two is our grant and other resource programs, and how we can really address the challenges and barriers we face there; and third, a bit more of an overarching line of effort. We seek your recommendations about how we as a Department can build trust – greater level of trust – and resilience with faith community stakeholders. It is a challenge that we did not seek to first overcome in the 2014-2018 time period or even before then. And I think we have to and we as a Department have to recognize that there are barriers that exist that cause people great hesitancy in partnering with us and we want to break down those barriers. Those are the three lines of effort and what we envision is the creation of subcommittees to tackle each of the three. You know a different subcommittee for each of the three lines of effort. We would ask that recommendations be submitted in a report to us within 120 days. Given the urgency of the moment of the challenges we face and that I've identified and I will say this it is my hope that as recommendations are developed we not wait 120 days until all the recommendations are formulated but we really treat it as ongoing and interactive, such that if a recommendation is formulated by a subcommittee we would vet it with the entire Council and present it to us, the Department, so that we can start improving on some before we start improving on all. So that is my hope if there is a workable way to do that. And that's what I would request that the Council those lines of effort that we have discussed here. Brenda and I and others thought that would be three very impactful very important initial lines of effort. And with that Brenda, I don't know if you'd like to open it up to discussion. However you'd like to proceed. And I very much appreciate everyone's time and energy dedicated to this.

Brenda Abdelall: Yes, sir, thank you very much. We do have some time to open it up for some questions before we shift to the closed portion of today's meeting today so if you have time for a few questions, we can do that.

Secretary Mayorkas: Questions, comments, concerns, additions, subtractions. This is a partnership.

Curtis Jones: I'm Curtis Jones and thank you sir for laying out these guidelines out and I'm happy to hear them. These have been my concerns and my teams' that I've been working with across the country. You hit all three of them right on target so I'm looking forward I'm gathering information from my colleagues across the country and bring information in whichever way we can support each of these three initiatives.

Secretary Mayorkas: Thank you very much.

Curtis Jones: Thank you.

Brenda Abdelall: Hyepin, I see your hand up.

Hyepin Im: So, I feel like Secretary Mayorkas, because you hit all the areas that I strongly believe in and that I believe is needed and it's actually an area we work in. I have recently been in conversation with one of your regional reps in Orange County and I want to ask, you know, you mentioned about the equity or the lack of access. And would your department consider funding building capacity of bank leaders?

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Perhaps you know, I think that we're invited into the room of this Commission, Advisory Board, because we have a certain level of capacity to engage and navigate the system. But I believe that for the vast majority of faith leaders that is not true. And so, if there was a way to an initiative that would add a category about building capacity for partnerships, that would be really, really invaluable at a minimum. Then, if that is not possible, perhaps funding for a certain set of consultants. That may be very specific, because sometimes if it's so broad and sometimes that gets lost or maybe the security, the nonprofit security grant, as a starting point that's very tangible. Quick turn-around, right, and it builds relationships. So those are just a couple of dots. I could go on and on, but I will put that in the subcommittee. Oh, one last thing. I know that again in outreach there's so many ways to do so but something again that's really easy to implement is to check your media distribution list serves at minimum even without translating et cetera, which is really critical. But, if not, then perhaps working and partnering and ensuring that all your communications are going out to the ethnic media or at least have a little bit of a chance they will get some of those communities that may not be served.

Secretary Mayorkas: Hyepin, thank you so much, I'll actually follow up on the ethnic media distribution issue in a meeting I have in a couple hours with our media personnel and then let us take a look at how we build the capacity of faith leaders. They're force multipliers. It's a cascading impact so let us take a look at what ability we have there. It's a really interesting question.

Hyepin Im: That would be great. I'd love to have a conversation with yourself or with Brenda, you know, just kind of what we do that has been very tangible and love to extend an invite to upcoming event too so thank you!

Secretary Mayorkas: Terrific, terrific. Thank you, Hyepin.

Brenda Abdelall: And Mr. Masters, I see your hand up.

Michael Masters: Mr. Secretary, one, just want to compliment you and your team, Brenda and Sameer, and everyone for the phenomenal work and also recognize particularly as we've dealt with a number of threats related to information sharing over the last several weeks, your leadership. So, I just want to echo the comment about how not only do I think these three lines of effort are essential, but they work very well in complementing one another. I would just perhaps flag on the third one. The recommendations for trust and resilience – one area I'd like to suggest being a component of that is ensuring unity of effort and vision with respect to faith-based outreach which can be a force multiplier for that and specifically ensuring that the messaging coming from when coordination with an entity like FEMA, is tracking with your messaging and the leadership in the Department, particularly around disaster – disasters and the recovery and response after that. And then I would just also, which is a general comment to the group, encourage us to think how we elevate the success stories of the Department and the work being done that's supporting our communities every day and to a point the Secretary made. We here at SCN, and the Jewish community, we host a number of webinars on the NSGP. I'll work with Brenda to get those out to everybody. They're open to everybody, and we'd like to encourage everyone to participate in them. The next one is a week from Thursday and however we can be helpful – to this group and all the faith-based communities to encourage participation – we'd like to be as part of this group.

Secretary Mayorkas: Thank you very much, Michael. The point I'm going to follow up on both and the consistency of messaging is a great thing for me to take for action internally here.

Brenda Abdelall: Rabbi Hauer, I see your hand up.

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Rabbi Moshe Hauer: Thank you. Good morning. Good morning, Mr. Secretary. It's always good to see you and we appreciate these convenings very much. I want to echo with great specificity as well. But what Michael was speaking of, as you well know, Mr. Secretary, over the past month we had two very specific threats to synagogues that through outstanding work of law enforcement, and the Department and others were addressed. The communication, in a great sense, worked. It worked to alert the community to the impending threat while it, while it still loomed. And there was there was trust-building in the fact that those threats were identified, the sources of the threat were found and preempted from being able to do harm, and that was a fantastic, fantastic victory, I would say, for your department and for, in general, the law enforcement community in general. That builds trust. Of course, those two events also build fear which is growing and growing unfortunately because of the climate change when it comes to hate in our country. And certainly, the normalization of antisemitism which has been a very, very disturbing trend. But what I would ask you to consider in terms of the building of trust, and I've raised this before, but you know every chance we get together it is somehow more profoundly felt because of what has happened in the past. And I think I'm not just speaking for the Jewish community that I technically represent but I think it's true for all of us the minorities, all the faith communities that are sitting at this table this virtual table. The normalization of this hatred and the way that it is seeping into the atmosphere and becoming normal is not from dramatic acts It's not from the things that make the headlines the successful, heaven forbid terror attacks, it's from the small acts the yelling the petty acts of violence which when we turn to law enforcement they say sorry it's too minor it's too insignificant for us to respond and the more that builds, and the more that happens, and the more that people experience it and feel that they really have nowhere to turn where they're going to get a response, the more trust arose, and the where the sense of security is. I don't know how specifically you lower the threshold, so to speak, of what constitutes a crime that can be that can be addressed by law enforcement. But we must do something to make real responses to the smaller, less headline grabbing acts, because that's what's going to build trust, and that's what's going to build a sense of security for all of our communities.

Secretary Mayorkas: Rabbi, it's a really important point. And I'm going to – there are local authorities that can be brought to bear but there are also Federal authorities – and this is something I'm going to discuss with the Attorney General about the guidelines for taking action in the US Attorney's Offices throughout the country on hate crimes.

Rabbi Hauer: I appreciate it.

Secretary Mayorkas: It's a really important point

Brenda Abdelall: Thank you. I also see we have a hand from Imam Magid as well.

Imam Magid: Good morning. I would like to thank you so much for really highlighting the three areas, and I will also let you echo the appreciation for your staff and for keeping in touch with the community all the time. I would like to suggest – to the point of the Rabbi – that maybe you have to have townhall meetings in major cities with people of faith, community host together for townhall meeting with law enforcement and local and federal. It shows solidarity. The community who, standing together, Muslim, Jewish, Sikhs, Hindus. They give the public the understanding that we are all in this together, and I think maybe that would be part of the messaging.

Secretary Mayorkas: I think that's a wonderful idea. I think that's a wonderful idea in different parts of the country. In multi-denominational, right, to open...

Imam Magid: Yes, thank you sir. We, as host committees, like a task force, hosting together law enforcement hosting together with this.

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Brenda Abdelall: Thank you, Imam. I also see Reverend Salguero.

Reverend Dr. Gabriel Salguero: Good Morning, Mr. Secretary, and thanks again for your hosting us and convening us and to your wonderful team and greetings from Florida. I just want to say that the model that we sometimes have after a natural disaster, where we have regional administrators meeting with local faith-based leaders, whether that's VOAD, or other things, is a model we can build upon, for, protecting houses of worship. The regional administrators have often met interfaith groups or multi-faith groups around natural disasters. I think the infrastructure, at least the FEMA infrastructure, can be copied for other issues of security. And I think this is what I think Mr. Masters and my good friend, Imam Magid, have said, how do we bring these case studies to the ground? Is it through the regional administrators in partnership with the faith-based leaders because the faith-based leaders have some power, convening, as do the regional administrators, and how do we continue to partner the regional administrators with the faith-based leaders? The second thing is I want to echo what my dear friend Hyepin Im has said about a kind of contextualized linguistically compatible, culturally compatible messaging, whether that's in the news media or in in the kind of missives that that your department sends, whether that's on FEMA or one of the other subcommittees. We really need to help in terms of magnifying that and getting kind of linguistically contextualized eyes on that. So that, I think is important, but I think the infrastructure already exists to build to scale some of these grants and getting out there. Along the regional administrators and their partnerships with existing faith-based groups and emerging. So, thank you, Señor Secretario.

Secretary Mayorkas: Thank you, Reverend. I will follow up. You know, it's interesting. I have to look at the capability of the regional leaders because we do have an infrastructure in place and just picking up on the Imam's point of convening the townhalls. We do have an architecture that we could tap into, whether those regional administrators are the correct people. We also have other security advisors you know from the infrastructure. Let me give that some thought. I do have some due outs to this Council from the comments and questions. I think Brenda, I've got time. Forgive me, but I see the Reverend Washington.

Brenda Abdelall: Yes, and also, I know Reverend Sharpton who is having some tech issues has a question as well. If you have time, those should be the last two questions.

Reverend Naomi Washington-Leapheart: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you everyone. I just want to express gratitude for the Department's convening. We're talking about townhalls and listening sessions this coming Thursday. I understand that there will be one, and I look forward to attending that one with leaders of the LGBTQ+ community in the wake of the shooting in Colorado Springs, and I want to also express gratitude, and also say that, as it relates to building trust and resilience, I think that that kind of activity is key. As we know the landscape, the religious landscape in our country is changing rapidly, and I think we need to pivot with that change. We need to broaden our understanding of what it means to be a sanctuary, what it means to be a refuge, what it means to be a house of worship, so that the resources and the expertise and the wisdom of the Department can spread more broadly. So, if we think about all the ways people gather in order to connect, be community, be of service, get a sense of safety and the sacred, the practice sacred ritual that expands beyond. Maybe some of the four wall institutions that that we've been so used to categorizing as faith-based and so I would love to see more of that. It connects to this idea of building trust and resilience in communities that currently don't trust our nation's ability to keep everybody safe. So, I want to say thank you and I'm looking forward to supporting our efforts to have more of those kinds of activities.

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Secretary Mayorkas: Ah, thank you so much, Reverend. I'll be participating on Thursday. The very important discussion in light of the tragedy, and what the tragedy reflects.

Brenda Abdelall: Are you able to come off mute Mr. Sharpton?

Reverend Al Sharpton: I want to join everyone by saluting you and your staff, Secretary, on this effort and how important it is. But I just want to chime in and support what Michael had to say, what the Imam had to say, because I think if we were able to do some of these gatherings around the country and do it inter-denominational and people can see that it helps to add to the healing. I think the Imam is absolutely right. One of the things that we did earlier this year when we did the hate crimes that you participated in and the President and the Vice President. It was very good to see all of us from very different organizations most of them secular come together. I think we need more of that so that when we have ten Blacks killed in Buffalo, all of us are affected. I think showing the unity across faith and racial and other lines – you've got to heal the country at the same time.

Secretary Mayorkas: Thank you for your point, the way you just framed it. You know these convenings will communicate the point, when they're multi-denomination, will communicate the point – that an act of hate is not ever against only one community, it is an act of hate because it's against all of us all and that's what brings us together. Brenda and I will confer and what we will do is then consult with all of you and we will actually develop a schedule for this coming calendar year to have a regular convening in different parts of the country where the Department and the Council can partner in hosting, and I think we will accomplish so much of what we've been talking about through that.

Brenda Abdelall: I appreciate your time today. Thank you, Secretary Mayorkas. I'll turn in over to Nicole as we shift to our closed portion of today's meeting. Thank you for joining us.

Secretary Mayorkas: Thank you all very much. Really appreciate it. I look forward to our partnership.

Dated: December 15, 2022

Sameer Hossain



Designated Federal Officer