

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Faith-Based Security Advisory Council Meeting
Virtual Public Meeting
Thursday, November 29, 2023
3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. EST
Meeting Minutes

The open session of the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council (FBSAC) meeting was convened on November 29, 2023, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. EST. 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.

PARTICIPANTS:

The following individuals participated during the meeting:

FBSAC Members:

Kiran Gill, Chair
Julie Schonfeld, Vice Chair
Chandru Acharya
Tracie Baker
Kimberly Burgo
Jeffery Cooper
Leslie Copeland-Tune
Moshe Hauer
Hyepin Im
Curtis Jones
Mohamed Magid
Alberto Martinez
Michael G. Masters
Garry McFadden
Jonah Pesner
Todd Richins
Mayya Saab
Issa Shahin
Naomi Washington-Leapheart
April Wood

DHS:

Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Brenda Abdelall, Assistant Secretary Office of Partnership and Engagement
Rebecca Sternhell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Sameer Hossain, Designated Federal Officer, FBSAC
Nicole Rosich, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, FBSAC

Erika Amaya, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, FBSAC

SAMEER HOSSAIN welcomed FBSAC members and the public to the meeting, reviewed Federal Advisory Council Act (FACA) guidelines for a public meeting, and introduced the FBSAC Chair, Kiran Gill.

CHAIR KIRAN GILL thanked the FBSAC members for their hard work on reports from three subcommittees: information sharing, DHS grants and resources, and building partnerships. She previewed the meeting agenda, including the topics of status of implementation of recommendations presented on June 6, 2023 and new taskings.

SAMEER HOSSAIN introduced Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas for his welcoming remarks.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “I want to thank all the members of the FBSAC for your continuing work in furtherance of the mission of our Department and the safety and security of our communities. When we first noticed this meeting, it was before October 7th, and it was my intention to begin my remarks with an overview of how this department has devoted itself to implementing the recommendations of the Council with respect to the taskings that Kiran referenced, and to also discuss one new tasking, and two additional taskings. We must recognize the tragedy of October 7th. The horrific terrorist attacks, the tragedies that are followed, and the hate that we have seen towards the Jewish people, towards the Palestinian people. I've seen a tremendous rise in hate and tragically, violence born out that hate. The increased level of antisemitism has been unprecedented, and we need to take stock of what is happening in communities across our country, reflect on what is happening in communities across the world, and ask ourselves, what can you do as leaders to be different?”

I visited members of the Tree of Life a few months ago on the margins of the summit against hate. I spoke with survivors of that horrific attack, and one of the survivors said that the greatest sources that helped her so significantly during a period of tremendous grief and trauma was that the interfaith community came together in support of the victims as a source of strength to get her through the days, and really renew an ability to have optimism about the days ahead. I ask all of you as leaders, whether there is an opportunity to provide that strength to the afflicted communities in our country right now by demonstrating that interfaith strength and promise. I would like to open it up to members of this Council, to share your thoughts with respect to what I can do, what our Department can do, and what each of you can do to get us to a better place.”

SAMEER HOSSAIN began moderation of responses from Council members.

SHERIFF GARRY MCFADDEN emphasized the importance for community outreach, the significance of this Council, and raised potential of Council members doing outreach in affected communities.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you.”

MAYYA SAAB noted the flare up in hostilities in the Holy Land since October 7th, causing fallout in the homeland among faith communities, has been especially insidious. She shared her concern for people in faith communities who have been targeted, whether they outwardly take a position on the conflict. She urged everyone to work on building and enacting trust during crises, such as the one being faced now. She urged DHS to be hypervigilant when members of the community reach out. She pointed out that clear messaging of civil rights, liberties, and religious freedom is critical, with special attention to freedom of speech.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “That we will. We hear those admonitions loudly and clearly and will respond.”

MICHAEL G. MASTERS emphasized the critical importance of unity in a country founded on the principles of religious freedom. He thanked the Secretary for the flexibility given to law enforcement to allow grants to be used to protect houses of worship. He urged the Council to make a joint statement as community leaders given the major impact of current events.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you.”

RABBI MOSHE HAUER: “It’s not a comment towards DHS, which we are grateful for bringing us together, but to speak to us together as a community of faith leaders from a wide variety of faith have come together to serve on this committee, and who trust and stand shoulder to shoulder, is a critical element. Our community, the Jewish community, that does stand proudly as a Zionist community, is feeling very deeply alienated and abandoned. We don’t hesitate, and we’ll never hesitate, no matter what happens, to stand in absolute condemnation of three Palestinians being shot in Vermont when they’re on vacation, or thousands of Syrians, innocent Syrian civilians being slaughtered and in civil wars, or black people being beaten on the streets of the United States, and senseless violence through bad actors and police forces, or omen being attacked and raped. We raise our voice about anybody and about everybody, and we will continue to do so because we believe in loving the stranger and in taking care of each other. We will stand up for that, no matter what.

We grieve over innocent loss of civilian life in Gaza during very difficult, necessary acts of self-defense the way we see them. I’m not going to get into this here, and I know everybody has feelings, but it has been shockingly lonely for us to not hear a lot of condemnation of the day of massacre, a day of rape, a day of kidnapping, a day of just unspeakable horror that affected our community. A couple of days ago, Imam Mohammed in the committee call, which I appreciated very much, spoke up about the tragedy, Islamophobia, and the violence. We are a traumatized community. We don’t have a unique monopoly on trauma, but we try to stand with others, and we have been very lonely. It would be welcome as a community that we stand shoulder to shoulder.”

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you, Rabbi.”

CHIEF ISSA SHAHIN remarked that Dearborn, Michigan – home to one of the largest concentrations of Arab Americans outside the Middle East – currently mirrors a post-September 11th environment. He noted the recent convening of multi-faith groups and the Dearborn police department addressed community fears and navigation tactics to crises, and stressed importance of an interfaith coalition. He recommended providing target-hardening training received by Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) to local police departments, so there is a representative within law enforcement agencies that can provide training on the front lines. He emphasized training officers will not only help ease the burden on PSAs, but provide a level of trust in the community.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Chief Shahin, thank you very much for that. We will follow up. I think that's an excellent idea. May I ask how the interfaith convening went, and if there were any lines of effort that resulted from it?”

CHIEF SHAHIN responded that during the interfaith convening, the incoming federal grants to harden targets was discussed, and a webinar happening the following week will be made available to them. There was a lot of value that came out of that interaction.

IMAM MOHAMED MAGID emphasized Rabbi Hauer’s message and the importance of community to stand together during this time of loss of youth’s lives. He suggested putting forward a public message condemning all killing of civilians and terrorism. He cited an example of the Department of Health and Human Services convening an interfaith group virtually. The public message would include law enforcement, community leaders, and the Attorney General condemning hate crimes, standing as a resilient community.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Imam, thank you very much for that. Is there anything immediate that you think our Council can and should do as a body?”

IMAM MOHAMED MAGID reiterated the need for a public message from the Council condemning hate.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you, Imam.”

REV. DR. LESLIE COPELAND-TUNE agreed and offered to co-sign a joint statement to send an important message to the country. She recognized the difficulty Muslim and Jewish communities face in continuing to build trust. She noted there is concern in Muslim communities over the hesitation to call an attack a hate crime when the attacker is considered white or a white supremacist, citing recent attack on the three Palestinian students in Vermont. She highlighted the constant worry places of worship face in upholding security needs. Jewish and Muslim students alike have been targeted, and there is a need to help build trust, so all communities feel protected in the U.S.

REV. NAOMI WASHINGTON-LEAPHEART recommended establishing more precise language as the FBSAC before issuing a joint statement. She acknowledged the difference between unity and uniformity of thought. She questioned, “What does security mean if there are differences in power? What does solidarity mean when there are differences in resources?” and urged these ideas to be flushed out before making a unified statement.

CHANDRU ACHARYA urged the use of the FBSAC platform to de-escalate community tension, build bridges, and offer open dialogue. He condemned all terrorist actions, believing they have no justification or legitimacy and stated Hindu Americans support equal measures of justice and freedom for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

DEPUTY CHIEF TRACIE BAKER emphasized that members of faith-based communities know that they have support of federal, state, and local partners to stand out against hate.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Earlier the Reverend made mention of the fact that there is sometimes a trust deficit or confidence deficit created when an incident is not swiftly identified as an act of hate. From my experience, sometimes there is a hesitancy for officials to identify an incident as an act of hate because of the tendency of the investigation and the potential charges that could be levied, and not to in any way prejudice the independence of the investigation and the fact-finding process. I wanted to share that thought. That may not speak broadly, but I know certainly is applicable to certain incidences.”

HYEPIN IM acknowledged the charged nature of the topic due to several reasons. She underscored the universal desire for safety regardless of events occurring in homeland. Ms. Im suggested that, as interfaith leaders, focusing on ensuring that homeland issues do not jeopardize safety within the country was crucial. She urged everyone to stand for a secure living space and opposed attacks on anyone within the nation. Expressing appreciation for the difficult conversation and echoing sentiments about trust-building, she anticipated the dialogue could evolve in multiple directions.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “I very much appreciate it. I will share with everybody – I felt it necessary to give members an opportunity to express themselves on behalf of members of the Council, as well as a representative of leadership voices. I felt it would be negligent to not address this issue given our role and the stature that each of you holds.”

HYEPIN IM suggested that sharing Department resources, particularly in terms of security or security grants, would have been beneficial given the ongoing situation. She noted that the impact was not limited to just the Muslim, Arab, or Jewish communities but extended to various other communities as well.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “I have two points on this matter. One, there is no such thing as a small act of hate, because the act of hate reverberates far more broadly than the targeted victim

or victims alone. Two, when an act of hate occurs, it is not only the targeted community, but everyone is victimized by it.”

ALBERTO MARTINEZ emphasized the need to showcase these positive attributes within FBSAC and exhibit exemplary practices observed in the community. He referenced a local Chabad event and suggested this group could spotlight best practices and available resources. He specifically mentioned entities within the Department such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA), the Office of Intelligence Analysis (I&A), and his collaborative efforts with Sheriff Don Barnes' interfaith Council, emphasizing the importance of highlighting these outreach initiatives. Acknowledging the prevalent tragedies, Mr. Martinez believed the FBSAC has the chance to showcase positive efforts amid such circumstances. He noted resource availability, acknowledging variations across urban areas, and highlighted proactive success within their own community. Mentioning a Faith-Based Liaison Officer at their Fusion Center focusing on outreach to all faiths, he identified this as a noteworthy practice to highlight within the group's discussions.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you. There are several actions that we can take based on the comments made, whether it is Ms. Saab’s opening suggestion with respect to the dissemination of information from the Department and other points to Mr. Martinez's point of sharing best practices and amplifying best practices and everything in between. Having local law enforcement participate in the trainings and adding a very important trust quotient so the people in that community see their law enforcement personnel, their partners, there is a very important message. The idea of resilience centers in cities is a very interesting idea. I think we have some very, very important takeaways.”

MICHAEL G. MASTERS expressed gratitude and noted an upcoming webinar highlighting physical and cyber safety and security tips for faith-based organizations and individuals. He mentioned hearing reports from the Jewish community about members being targeted in their homes and workplaces, with organizations experiencing vandalism and graffiti from individuals linked to various ideologies. He noted a concerning trend where individuals from different ideological backgrounds seemed to share a dislike for the Jewish community at times. He also mentioned online threats, such as doxing and other forms of cyber threats against organizations and individuals.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you, Michael.”

RABBI HAUER expressed his perspective on the committee’s ability to speak unanimously. He highlighted the importance of individual voices, emphasizing that while they might not always form a collective voice, each member’s singular voice held significant value. Acknowledging that as leaders and representatives, they had the power to clearly and unequivocally stand up for what they believed in, he expressed anticipation to hear numerous individual voices. He concluded by thanking everyone.

REV. DR. LESLIE COPELAND-TUNE reflected on a point made by Mr. Masters regarding online trolls and the exploitation of conflicts to deepen divisions. She highlighted the ongoing cybersecurity efforts and proposed amplifying these resources. Additionally, she urged for methods to assist people in recognizing misinformation and lies spread through social media, aiming to address the uncertainty prevalent across various communities. Acknowledging the complexity of issuing a statement as a group, she expressed hope for finding common ground even amid challenging conversations. Referencing the upcoming Advent season centered around love, peace, and hope, she wished to infuse those sentiments into the ongoing national discourse.

SAMEER HOSSAIN reminded the group that any questions pertaining to this meeting can be emailed to the FBSAC email address, which is FBSAC@hq.dhs.gov.

RABBI JONAH DOV PESNER expressed concern about the impact of making statements, proposing a shift towards initiating conversations and fostering sacred dialogues. He cited Imam Magid as an example of building solidarity through relationships and suggested the Council facilitate discussions to amplify voices through videos or testimonials showcasing real solidarity. He cautioned against potential conflict arising from attempting to modify each other's positions and platforms. Despite this concern, he conveyed his admiration for the group and gratitude to Secretary Mayorkas for convening them.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: "Rabbi, thank you very much. On the issue of the statement, it is clear the Council is not able to make a joint statement. I defer to the Council. It certainly wasn't a recommendation of mine, and my recommendation was only that Council members give thought to what, if anything, the Council can do. My hope has been very much fulfilled in that we have received a series of recommendations that are very thoughtful and will be effective. I was very moved by Rabbi Hauer's comment that if it's not to be a collective voice, individual voices can be used to impart important messages, as the Reverend said, of peace and love for one another, concepts that should never be considered trite regardless of the words we use."

SHERIFF MCFADDEN reflected on his initial assumption that the group was prepared to take immediate action but realized a need for a more cohesive approach. He highlighted the importance of addressing crises when they directly impact loved ones, emphasizing the potential advisory role the group could play in assisting law enforcement partners and communities. Considering his extensive law enforcement experience and involvement in securing places of worship, he recognized the upcoming holiday season might create vulnerabilities due to diverted attention. He expressed concern about the possibility of becoming more vulnerable to further crises if precautions are not taken. Acknowledging the need for a collective approach and more frequent meetings to establish solidarity and common ground, he expressed a willingness to contribute in any way necessary, despite his initial anticipation for quicker progress.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: "Thank you so much, Sheriff. I believe this Council and its members are certainly ready to provide security advice. Many of the members provide advice and share best practices in their daily jobs. Ultimately, there is a difference between providing

advice and putting out a joint statement of the Council. I believe those are two very different things. Thank you all for your openness, candor, and expressions of thought on this subject. We received extremely thoughtful recommendations from you on the three taskings back in June and I want to assure everyone that we are well underway in implementing them.

The Office of Partnership and Engagement (OPE) has led listening sessions and roundtable discussions with faith-based organizations and faith-based security practitioners to share information and identifying areas for improvement for reporting suspicious activity and incidents.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) recently made changes to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) application process to advance these goals. For example, they've developed and published a publicly accessible video about the application process updating the sub-applicant. Also, we created a quick start guide with plain language giving nonprofit organizations that had not previously received grant funding, and organizations located within one hundred underserved communities, an additional fifteen points in their final review score. We are trying to achieve equity.

I&A has expanded the NSGP application. Their quarterly threat briefings will now include all the Department's faith and community stakeholders. I encourage you to continue to attend those briefings and to share the invitations throughout your network. We will consider whether the cadence of those briefings needs to change considering the environment in which we are currently living.

We launched our Department website that is regularly updated with threat assessments pertaining to the homeland and all relevant resources to keep the faith-based communities and institutions. The look to the Building Trust and Partnership Subcommittee's recommendations in the wake of Hamas's attack on the rise in hate-fueled violence. We continue to recognize the trust of the communities we serve must be earned, and we are working every day across our department to do so.

There is a new tasking that I would like to share. We continue to see, tragically, an increase in the amount of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Last year the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) recorded approximately 88 million images of children online. I would request that this Council form a subcommittee to review our efforts on combatting online child sexual exploitation and abuse, including recommendations on how we can partner with faith-based leaders and communities to address this problem, and quite critically to raise awareness.

I have tasked the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) and the Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council (HSAPC) with other aspects of this tasking. First, is the issue of countering foreign malign influence (FMI) following the allegations that the June murder of a Sikh Activist in Canada may have been linked to a foreign government. With the Department of

Justice announcing charges, it would be very helpful to have this Council develop a DHS strategy to protect faith-based stakeholders from FMI and incidents of transnational repression occurring within the United States, whereby foreign, repressive governments may stalk, intimidate, or assault individuals.

The effort would focus on how faith-based leaders and security professionals can amplify DHS information on these threats, encourage reporting of incidents to appropriate authorities, and provide feedback on the effectiveness of existing safety and security resources. An additional tasking is on countering and responding to targeted violence and terrorism. The Council will survey existing multi-faith initiatives nationwide to establish a best practices toolkit on how faith-based organizations and institutions can improve preparedness against threats of targeted violence and terrorism, and therefore advance prevention.”

CHAIR GILL thanked the Council for the discussion and contributions on the challenging subject. As a leader in the Sikh American community and a national civil rights organization, addressing transnational repression held significant resonance. Recent allegations of state-sponsored violence against a Canadian citizen, particularly an American from New York, emphasized the pressing nature of this issue. She expressed full support and endorsement for the proposed task and looked forward to collaborating on this and other shared objectives.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you.”

IMAM MOHAMED MAGID emphasized that the tasking is crucial as the rising number of affected children is deeply saddening because they are innocent souls. He echoed concern regarding government officials’ vulnerability to cyber threats in both America and our kingdoms. He thanked the Secretary.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “Thank you.”

CHAIR GILL reiterated that the day's discussion had been enlightening, acknowledging, and appreciating the insightful contributions from all Council members during this challenging period. She emphasized the urgent need to prioritize the safety of faith-based communities, given the alarming increase in hate crimes across the nation. Highlighting the Council's unity, she emphasized its foundation in a shared commitment to this cause, drawing strength from the diverse perspectives and expertise within the group. She expressed eagerness towards collaborating on upcoming tasks and extended gratitude to everyone for their dedicated time and commitment to the Council's work.

VICE CHAIR RABBI JULIE SCHONFELD expressed gratitude for Secretary Mayorkas gathering the members for an essential, yet difficult conversation. Her identity as a Jew and an American Jew is deeply intertwined, and the feeling of being unsafe challenged not just her sense of community but also her spiritual connection to their faith. Despite these challenges, being present with everyone in that moment provided a sense of comfort and reassurance. She believes

in the collective effort to ensure safety for everyone in the shared sacred homeland, especially as they approached a season where many traditions sought solace in illuminating the longer nights. Drawing inspiration from the spirit of hospitality observed in the region of Israel and Palestine, he urged for a similar ethos to prevail, creating an environment where everyone felt secure amid these difficult times, steering towards brighter days together.

CHAIR GILL expressed hope that the members could unify to create a statement representing their diverse perspectives. She highlighted the shared desire for community safety and expressed readiness to contribute to this collective effort. Finally, she offered thanks for the opportunity.

SECRETARY MAYORKAS: “The Chair and the Vice-Chair said it beautifully. I want to express my gratitude to all of you. Thank you.”

Meeting was adjourned.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Signed and Dated



Kiran Kaur Gill, Chair, Faith-Based Security Advisory Council