

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2009

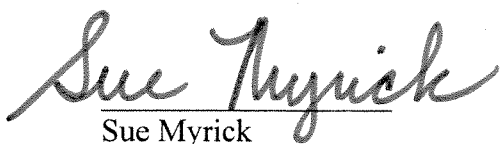
BEWARE of CAIR

Dear Colleague:

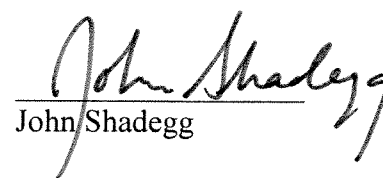
Members should think twice before meeting with representatives of CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations). The FBI has cut ties with them. There are indications that this group has connections to HAMAS.

We encourage you and your staff to read the article below regarding this matter.

Sincerely,


Sue Myrick


Pete Hoekstra


John Shadegg


Paul Broun


Trent Franks

FBI Cuts Off CAIR Over Hamas Questions

by Mary Jacoby (*IPT News*)

January 29, 2009

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/article/985>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has cut off contacts with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) amid mounting concern about the Muslim advocacy group's roots in a Hamas-support network, the Investigative Project on Terrorism has learned.

The decision to end contacts with CAIR was made quietly last summer as federal prosecutors prepared for a second trial of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), an Islamic charity accused of providing money and political support to the terrorist group Hamas, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

CAIR and its chairman emeritus, Omar Ahmad, were named un-indicted co-conspirators in the HLF case. Both Ahmad and CAIR's current national executive director, Nihad Awad, were revealed on government wiretaps as having been active participants in early Hamas-related organizational meetings in the United States. During testimony, FBI agent Lara Burns described CAIR as a front organization.

Hamas is a US-designated foreign terrorist organization, and it's been illegal since 1995 to provide support to it within the United States.

The decision to end contacts with CAIR is a significant policy change for the FBI. For years, the FBI worked with the national organization and its state chapters to address Muslim community concerns about the potential for hate crimes and other civil liberty violations in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

But critics said the FBI improperly conferred legitimacy on CAIR by meeting with its officials, even as its own investigative files contained evidence of CAIR leaders' ties to Hamas.

Last autumn, FBI field offices began notifying state CAIR chapters that bureau officials could no longer meet with them until CAIR's national leadership in Washington had addressed issues raised by the HLF trial, according to people with knowledge of the notifications.

CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper declined to comment Wednesday when the IPT called for comment. Before hanging up, Hooper said "We're more than happy to cooperate with legitimate media. But we don't cooperate with those who promote anti-Muslim bigotry."

In one letter obtained by IPT News, James E. Finch, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Oklahoma City field office, canceled a meeting of the local Muslim Community Outreach Program, a state-federal program designed to enlist Muslims in terrorism prevention and investigate reports of civil liberties violations.

"Regrettably, due to circumstances beyond my control, the meeting will be postponed until further notice as a result of the planned participation by the Oklahoma chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations," Finch's Oct. 8, 2008 letter to Muslim groups in the Oklahoma outreach program said.

Finch made clear the Oklahoma office valued its relationship with local Muslims. He said the stumbling block to further outreach was CAIR's national leadership.

"[I]f CAIR wishes to pursue an outreach relationship with the FBI, certain issues must be addressed to the satisfaction of the FBI. Unfortunately, these issues cannot be addressed at the local level and must be addressed by the CAIR National Office in Washington, D.C.," the letter said.

A spokesman for the FBI's Oklahoma City office referred questions about the letter to the FBI's national press office. In Washington, FBI spokesman John Miller said, "We've certainly been in contact with CAIR chapters" about the un-indicted co-conspirator designation. "The letter speaks for itself."

Letters with similar wording were sent in other states, people with knowledge of the matter said. It is not known how many letters were issued, but the FBI has had strong working relationships with CAIR chapters in states including Ohio, Michigan, Arizona and Florida.

Hamas was formed in 1987 as the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the global Islamic political movement that aims to spread the rule of Shariah, or Islamic law, throughout the world.

A North American branch of the Brotherhood supervised HLF, CAIR and other organizations to build political, financial and public relations support for Hamas, evidence at the HLF trial showed.

The U.S.-based Brotherhood formed a Palestine Committee, headed by Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzook, in 1988 during the first intifada uprising in Palestinian territories against Israel. Hamas's stated policy is for the destruction of Israel.

CAIR co-founders Ahmad and Awad were early active members of the Palestine Committee, evidence showed. Wiretaps recorded the two CAIR leaders participating in strategy meetings of the committee in the 1990s, and both were also on a phone list of its members, the evidence showed.

The first HLF trial in Texas ended in a mistrial in October 2007. In November 2008, the second trial resulted in convictions of five former HLF officials on all counts of providing material support to Hamas.

It is unclear what changed between the first and second HLF trials to make the FBI rescind its policy of outreach to CAIR. The un-indicted co-conspirator designations were made on May 27, 2007 in connection with the first HLF trial. Moreover, much of the evidence linking the CAIR officials to Hamas was aired in an earlier public trial in 2006.

CAIR, however, vigorously challenged the un-indicted co-conspirator designation as a violation of its First and Fifth Amendment rights, accusing the government of "demonization of all things Muslim" in a brief filed in the summer of 2007 with the US District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

The co-conspirator designation is "particularly insidious and ironic as CAIR is an organization dedicated to fostering acceptance of Muslims in American society and protecting the civil liberties of all Muslim Americans," CAIR's brief read.

The government filed a brief on Sept. 4, 2007 opposing CAIR's filing, arguing the group lacked standing to challenge the co-conspirator designation and that the matter was moot, as the evidence was already entered into the public record. The judge never ruled on CAIR's request.

The HLF trial showed that CAIR was formed to covertly influence US opinions of the Palestinian conflict and Islam, but without revealing its connections to Hamas.

For example, prosecutors introduced transcripts of wiretaps from a 1993 meeting in Philadelphia of the Palestine Committee, called to order by Ahmad (see page 10 of the hyperlink) and attended by Awad. In that meeting, Ahmad and others discussed the need to create a new political organization seemingly unconnected to Hamas or the Brotherhood.

In one excerpt, (see page 4 of the link) an unidentified male said: "We must form a new organization for activism which will be neutral, because we are placed in a corner, we are place in a corner. It is known who we are, we are marked and I believe there should be a new neutral organization which works on both sides."

CAIR was founded a year later, in 1994, by Ahmad and Awad. In March 1994, Awad was taped at Miami's Barry University publicly declaring his support for Hamas: "I am in support of the Hamas movement more than the PLO," Awad said.

A July 30, 1994 agenda for the Palestine Committee, seized by federal agents and introduced at trial, showed that "suggestions to develop the work" of HLF, CAIR and other organizations was on the agenda.

Under the heading "The need for trained resources in the media and political fields," the agenda said: "No doubt America is the ideal location to train the necessary resources to support the Movement worldwide."

By 1995, CAIR was conducting public relations work to counter the US detention of Mousa Abu Marzook, the Hamas official and Palestine Committee member who was also head of the Muslim Brotherhood in the US.

A transcript of an August 1995 phone call intercepted by government investigators showed HLF officials Shukri Abu Baker and Ghassan Elashi talking about CAIR's efforts (see page 12 of the link).

Days before the 2001 terrorist attacks, the FBI raided the offices of Infocom, a Texas internet company connected to HLF. CAIR's Nihad Awad appeared at a press conference outside Infocom headquarters to denounce what he called an "anti-Muslim witch hunt."

CAIR remained a vocal player in the public debate after 9/11. It developed relationships with members of Congress. FBI officials frequently attended CAIR fundraising banquets, and CAIR cited such contacts in its own literature and Web site as evidence of its good standing with the government.

Mary Jacoby is an award winning reporter who has worked for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Salon.com*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Roll Call*. She may be reached at writetomaryjacoby@gmail.com