

April 24, 2014

Via Electronic Mail

President Joe Daniels and Director Alice Greenwald
National September 11 Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center
200 Liberty Street, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10281

Re: Concerns

Dear Joe Daniels and Alice Greenwald,

As organizations representing Americans of various ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, Arab American, South Asian American, and Muslim American in particular, we express concern about a video produced for the September 11 Memorial Museum titled "The Rise of al-Qaeda." This video is apparently the centerpiece of the section of the museum's permanent exhibition that explains the causes of September 11.

We have learned that you have been aware, since at least June 2013, that viewers have found this video confusing and possibly inflammatory. The museum's own interfaith religious advisory group has repeatedly asked that this video be edited, with their concerns being dismissed.

According to their testimony, the video:

- Deploys haphazard and academically controversial terminology, in particular "Islamic" and "Islamist", to generalize, unnecessarily, about al-Qaeda's acts of terrorism.
- Does not properly contextualize al-Qaeda as a small organization in comparison to the world's 1.6 billion Muslims.
- Uses stereotypical, accented English for speakers of Arabic in translation.
- May give some viewers, especially those not familiar with the subtleties of the terminology being used, the impression that Islam, as a religion, is responsible for September 11.

The existence, and your dismissal, of these concerns are extremely worrisome for our organizations. The September 11 Memorial Museum, built with hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money, will inevitably become one of the nation's most visited cultural institutions. Many of the constituencies that our organizations represent have suffered from stigmatization, discrimination, and increased hate crimes since September 11, 2001. The September 11 Memorial Museum has explicitly pledged to project moral authority and foster a better world, and we urge you to avoid potentially contributing to further discrimination through an ill-considered and insufficiently vetted video.

Therefore, we request (a) that we be allowed to view the video and the exhibit which it is a part of so that we can judge the context in which it is shown; (b) a meeting to discuss any concerns we may have regarding the same; and (c) that you heed the advice of your interfaith advisory council and explore editing the video before opening so that these concerns are properly addressed. Our organizations, representing tens of millions of Americans, would be willing to cooperate in facilitating academic review.

We fully appreciate the solemn and important purpose of the September 11 Memorial Museum to honor the victims of the horrendous attacks of September 11 -- including hundreds of Arab and Muslim Americans -- and to narrate the events of that day. We sincerely wish to contribute to your institution and to be involved in the dialogue about its exhibition and programs.

Sincerely,

Samer Khalaf
President, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

Lena Alhusseini
Executive Director, Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC)

Maya Berry
Executive Director, Arab American Institute (AAI)

Nihad Awad
National Executive Director, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

Salam Al-Marayati
President, Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)

Nadia Tonova
Director, National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)

Sarab Al-Jijakli
President, Network of Arab-American Professionals (NAAP)