

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 3, 2011

Dear Ms. Khera:

Thank you for your letter of October 19, 2011 in which you raise a number of important issues regarding the training provided to law enforcement, the military, and other government officials on cultural competency and countering violent extremism (CVE). Please allow me to share with you the specific steps we are taking to ensure that federal officials and state, local, and tribal partners receive accurate, evidence-based information in these critical areas.

I am aware of the recent unfortunate incidents that have highlighted examples of substandard and offensive training that some United States Government elements have either sponsored or delivered. Any and all such training runs completely counter to our values, our commitment to strong partnerships with communities across the country, our specific approach to countering violent extremist recruitment and radicalization, and our broader counterterrorism (CT) efforts. Our National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States highlights competent training as an area of priority focus and states that "misinformation about the threat and dynamics of radicalization to violence can harm our security by sending local stakeholders in the wrong direction and unnecessarily creating tensions with potential community partners." It also emphasizes that our security is "inextricably linked to our values," including "the promotion of an inclusive society."

Your letter requests that "the White House immediately create an interagency task force to address this problem," and we agree that this is necessary. That is why the White House's National Security Staff identified training as a critical area for improvement last November, and tasked the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to form an Interagency Working Group on Training to catalogue, review, and improve CVE-related instruction across

all levels of government. Recent efforts of this working group include: (1) a CVE Training Guidance and Best Practices paper, which will give specific guidance to federal, state, local, and tribal government officials charged with organizing training related to CVE, CT, or cultural awareness; and (2) an Information Bulletin on CVE Training, which provides additional guidance to state, local, and tribal entities that regularly leverage federal grants to fund CVE-related trainings. DHS has sent both documents to all DHS grantees, state and local governments, state and local law enforcement, relevant community stakeholders, and interagency partners.

In addition to these specific actions, Departments and Agencies are taking aggressive steps to create broader review processes and build rigorous CVE curriculum standards. These include: (1) collecting all training materials that contain cultural or religious content, including information related to Islam or Muslims; (2) establishing a process, in consultation with subject matter experts, to ensure that such materials comply with core American values, professional standards, and the United States Constitution; and (3) writing guidance for CVE training, which will be shared with components, field offices, and external partners. Moreover, we are committed to engaging in a sustained dialogue with all relevant stakeholders on these issues as we move forward.

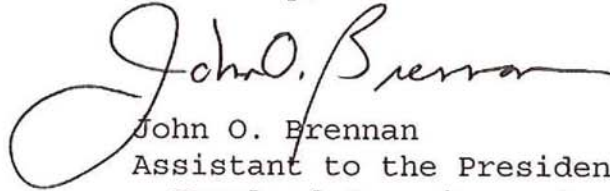
We share your sense of concern over these recent unfortunate incidents, and are moving forward to ensure problems are addressed with a keen sense of urgency. They do not reflect the vision that the President has put forward, nor do they represent the kind of approach that builds the partnerships that are necessary to counter violent extremism, and to protect our young people and our homeland. America's greatest strength is its values, and we are committed to pursuing policies and approaches that draw strength from our values and our people irrespective of their race, religion or ethnic background.

Finally, we are currently developing an implementation plan for our Domestic CVE Strategy, which will provide further detailed information on the specific steps necessary to improve CVE and cultural competency training across the United States Government and measure progress.



While much work remains, I am confident that concrete actions are being taken to address the valid concerns you raised. Thank you again for your letter and for your leadership in addressing an issue that is critical to ensuring the security of the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John O. Brennan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning of the first name.

John O. Brennan  
Assistant to the President for  
Homeland Security and  
Counterterrorism

Ms. Farhana Khera  
President & Executive Director  
Muslim Advocates