

April 3, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We urge you to establish a Presidential Task Force on preventing and combating hate violence to begin an important national dialogue on how best to counter hate. As you know, there has been an alarming rise in hate violence and threats against religious and racial minorities across the United States. Jewish institutions have been the target of bomb threats and vandalism. Mosques have been set on fire. Sikh and Hindu Americans have been victimized. African Americans have been targeted. These crimes and threats of violence are unacceptable and are contrary to America's foundational values of tolerance, respect, and freedom of religion.

In 2015, there were 5,580 hate-related crimes according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In 2016, there were a record 139 incidents of violence against mosques in the United States. Since the beginning of 2017, Jewish cemeteries have been vandalized, synagogues have been targeted with swastika graffiti and hate fliers, and there have been more than 150 anti-Semitic threats of violence against Jewish Community Centers, schools, and other institutions across the country. Earlier this month in Washington state, a Sikh American was shot and wounded. The suspect, who reportedly yelled "go back to your country," has yet to be identified. Tragically, in Kansas, an Indian American was shot and killed by a man who allegedly shouted, "get out of my county." Recently, a white supremacist traveled to New York for the expressed purpose of a killing a black man; unfortunately he succeeded and stabbed a black man to death. We are alarmed at the growing number of hate-related crimes and threats of violence in our country. It is important to remember that these statistics represent individual lives and each incident reverberates throughout our communities.

A Presidential Task Force to prevent and combat hate violence would bring together faith leaders, community advocates, federal and local government agencies, law enforcement, and other relevant professionals to analyze the causes behind the rise in hate, identify possible solutions, and to improve access to resources to fight back. There are multiple examples of past Presidential Task Forces and Commissions that were formed to address pressing social issues. For example, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice created by President Johnson in 1967 led to improvements in the juvenile justice system and the treatment of juvenile offenders. The President's Commission on the Holocaust created in 1978 and headed by Elie Wiesel led to the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – a living memorial to confront hatred, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity.

In 2014, the White House and the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community established a Presidential Bullying Prevention Task Force to identify and overcome barriers to reporting and addressing the harassment that young AAPI people face. It held 29 listening sessions across the country and organized a summit with federal officials and local community members. The task force led to the development of new outreach strategies to stop bullying in the AAPI community. It also created a website to provide a one-stop comprehensive informational tool. A similar model could be used to address the rise in hate.

A new Presidential Task Force to prevent and combat hate violence would make addressing this issue a national priority. It would promote federal interagency collaboration and more federal, state, and local cooperation. The task force would convene the brightest minds to develop solutions and enable stakeholders to share and disseminate best practices more widely. It could serve as a national clearinghouse for information and other resources. It might result in town hall meetings and create new opportunities for partnerships between federal agencies and local stakeholders. Most importantly, the task force could facilitate the broader dialogue that is needed to stop the rise in hate violence, to improve security, and to save lives.

We urge you to create a Presidential Task Force on hate violence and we hope can work with you to stop the rise in hate across our country.