

Former counterterrorism chief says Muslims cooperate

Omar Sacirbey Religion News Service | Mar. 9, 2011

A former FBI counterterrorism director on Tuesday rejected allegations by the chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee that Muslim Americans don't cooperate with law enforcement in terror investigations.

Rep. Peter King, a Long Island Republican, will open hearings on Thursday about Muslim radicalization that critics say unfairly singles out Muslims.

"I will tell you in no uncertain terms that the community has on multiple occasions come forward and assisted law enforcement," said Michael Rolince, who headed the Counterterrorism Division in the FBI's Washington field office between 2002 and 2005.

Rolince said the hearings and heated "rhetoric" from politicians attacking Muslims undermine that cooperation, and said smart counterterrorism strategy requires engaging with Muslim Americans.

"You talk to everyone and then you figure out who's going to be helpful, who's going to be harmful, and who's not going to be a factor," said Rolince, speaking in a conference call sponsored by Muslim Advocates, a civil rights group in San Francisco. "This is not easy. Anyone who thinks you can just snap your fingers and everyone's going to go along and understand both sides of the equation is in the wrong line of work."

Despite his criticism of the King hearings, Rolince said he hoped some good would come of the controversial hearings. "I think this is going to be a great conversation after the hearings," he said.

Muslim Advocates used the call to announce a new website, <http://www.whatunites.us>, where people are asked to sign a pledge "against fearmongering." Current signatories include 9/11 Families For Peaceful Tomorrows, the Sikh Coalition, the North Carolina Council of Churches and the American Muslim Law Enforcement Officers Association.

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