



## CAIR vs. Human Rights

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The [St. Petersburg Declaration](#), issued at the Secular Islam Summit in St. Petersburg, Florida, last week, is the most comprehensive and forthright statement of Islamic reform anyone has yet managed to come up with. Instead of denying the existence of the elements of Islam that are being used around the world today to incite violence and justify oppression – as do all too many putative Islamic reformers and moderates – the St. Petersburg Declaration is firmly rooted in reality, and evinces no interest in fashionable evasions or political correctness.

Confronting directly the elements of Islamic Sharia law that are at variance with otherwise generally accepted principles of human rights, it affirms “the inviolable freedom of the individual conscience,” in contrast to the Muslim prophet Mu-

hammad’s dictum, “If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him” ([Bukhari 4.52.260](#)), and calls upon governments to “oppose all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy.” It declares, “We believe in the equality of all human persons,” cutting against the Qur’anic observation that non-Muslims are the “the worst of created beings” ([98:6](#)) and that “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves” ([48:29](#)).

Challenging the jihadist aspirations to establish a unified Islamic state under the rule of Sharia, the Declaration states: “We insist upon the separation of religion from state and the observance of universal human rights.... We call on the governments of the world to reject Sharia law, fatwa courts, clerical rule, and

state-sanctioned religion in all their forms...”

Anticipating criticism, the Declaration adds: “We see no colonialism, racism, or so-called ‘Islamaphobia’ in submitting Islamic practices to criticism or condemnation when they violate human reason or rights.”

But some do – notably the Council on American Islamic Relations. [CAIR’s Ahmed Bedier huffed](#), “In order to have legitimate reform, you need to have the right messengers.” In [an editorial](#), Investor’s Business Daily gave the perfect response to this: “And who might that be? The four CAIR executives who have been successfully prosecuted on terrorism-related charges? The CAIR co-founder who said the Quran should replace the U.S. Constitution as ‘the highest authority in America’?”

Bedier complained that the Summit was funded by “neoconservatives,” and objected to the Secular Islam Summit because it featured many ex-Muslims, including Ibn Warraq, Wafa Sultan, and Nonie Darwish. But CAIR’s opposition to the Summit may offer one hint as to why they felt they had to leave the fold. As Tawfik Hamid, author of *The Roots of Jihad*, [told Bedier](#) on the Glenn Beck show, “The truth should be independent of whoever says it.”

That simple fact seems to have eluded CAIR, as it eludes so many these days. Its [denunciations](#) of the Secular Islam Summit have focused on speakers there, not on the mes-

sage. And unfortunately, no journalist has had the presence of mind or the courage to ask any CAIR official point-blank what he or she actually thinks of the content of the St. Petersburg Declaration.

The Council on American Islamic Relations bills itself as “America’s largest Islamic civil liberties group” and claims that “its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.” The mainstream media and even many government and law enforcement officials accept it as a moderate group. CAIR officials have worked with the FBI and other organizations at the highest levels.

Yet suspicions persist about the group, due not only to the terror convictions of several of its former officials and the questionable statements of some of its spokesmen, but because it always seems to be on the opposing side of anti-terror efforts, as well as of any honest attempt to examine and reform the elements of Islam that jihadists are using to justify violence today.

In light of all that, the St. Petersburg Declaration offers CAIR a golden opportunity to demonstrate the genuineness of its claim to moderation. Since Hamid’s dictum that the truth is independent of the identity of the speaker is manifestly true, CAIR should declare its support for the St. Petersburg Declaration. Shouldn’t a dedicated and sincere group of Islamic moderates jump at

the chance to go on record opposing “all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy,” as well as opposing “female circumcision, honor killing, forced veiling, and forced marriage”?

Shouldn't CAIR gladly and without hesitation endorse a statement calling for protection of “sexual and gender minorities from persecution and violence” and the elimination of “sectarian education that teaches intolerance and bigotry towards non-Muslims”? Isn't CAIR dedicated to protecting “civil liberties”? And as for the developing of “an open public sphere in which all matters may be discussed without coercion or intimidation,” wouldn't such a public atmosphere help CAIR “encourage dialogue” and “build coalitions”?

What's not to like? CAIR need not worry that endorsing the St. Petersburg Declaration will lead anyone to think they are associated with the “neoconservatives” behind the Summit. But such an endorsement would go a long way toward reassuring people that CAIR is indeed what it presents itself to be, and not a group whose goals are, in fact, quite different from those of the St. Petersburg Declaration.

Reporters should be asking Nihad Awad and Ibrahim Hooper this week: do you endorse the St. Petersburg Declaration? And if not, why not? Don't tell us, gentlemen, what you think of the people involved. Tell us what you think of the principles expressed and statements made. We are listening. Let the dialogue begin.

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