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LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ANNOUNCES SUPPORT FOR FEDERAL LITIGATION TO END RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION BY AIRLINES

For Immediate Release

Washington, D.C. –The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's oldest and most diverse coalition of civil and human rights organizations, today announced its strong support for the five lawsuits filed today in federal court challenging the practice of discrimination against individuals perceived to be Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim by four major U.S. airlines.

The lawsuits, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and Relman & Associates, a Washington, D.C. based civil rights law firm, allege that the airlines, by denying service to individuals only because of their perceived ethnicity, national origin, or religion, violated state and federal civil rights laws, including 42 U.S.C. § 1981 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibit discrimination based on race, color or national origin in the formation and enforcement of contracts and by recipients of federal financial assistance, respectively.

“Our country has a deep-rooted tradition of combating discrimination and overt prejudice against recognized groups of people,” said Wade Henderson, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference. “This is no different. Treating people differently only because of their perceived race, ethnicity, or religion is wrong. It was wrong on the buses in Alabama in the 1950s and it is wrong on the airlines in the 21st Century.” “The battle for equality in commercial transportation is as old as the civil rights movement,” continued Henderson. “This is Civil Rights 101.”

In the cases announced today, all of the individuals who were refused service by the airlines had cleared all of the relevant security checks utilized by the airlines. Nevertheless, they were not permitted to travel because of objections raised by other passengers or crew members. “This is not about security; it is about unequal treatment,” said Raul Yzaguirre of the National Council of La Raza. “We cannot allow the ignorance and prejudice of a few to trump the civil rights of law-abiding members of our society.”

(*Deceased)

“Equality In a Free, Plural, Democratic Society”



A recent report released by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC), *Backlash: When America Turned on its Own*, outlined the rise of acts of intolerance against South Asians and Sikhs. “Our report suggests the need to be proactive in our fight for the rights of all Americans,” said Karen Narasaki, Executive Director of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC). “This litigation is a good place to start.”

“What is required of us is a continued commitment to pursuing issues of justice and fairness over injustice and bigotry,” said LCCR’s Henderson. “In bringing this lawsuit, the civil rights community has clearly stated that we will not sit back while our basic freedoms are eroded by wholesale intolerance and ignorance.”

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