

# PROJECT SALAM

Support And Legal Advocacy for Muslims

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Dear Concerned Community Member,

We write to you as representatives of Project SALAM, a nationwide group of people who have witnessed various “terrorism” trials in different parts of the country and who have concluded that innocent Muslims are being targeted and convicted for crimes they have not committed. Project SALAM is devoted to researching and documenting the likelihood that the United States Justice Department’s post-9/11 prosecutions of “terrorists” have included a significant number of Muslims who are, in fact, innocent of any crime. We believe other cases have been severely overcharged and/or over-sentenced. On our website, [www.projectsalam.org](http://www.projectsalam.org), we present summaries of many of these cases and explain why we think these trials are unfair. Several independent journalists agree with us, as shown in these recent articles in major magazines:

- “Little Gitmo” by Christopher Stewart in *New York Magazine*,  
<http://nymag.com/news/features/yassin-aref-2011-7/>
- “To Catch a Terrorist” by Petra Bartosiewicz in *Harper’s Magazine*,  
<http://www.projectsalam.org/downloads/HarpersMagazine-terrorism-Bartosiewicz.pdf>
- “The Informants” by Trevor Aaronson in *Mother Jones*,  
<http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/08/fbi-terrorist-informants>

On September 19, 2011, a trial is scheduled to take place in your area—in New Bern, North Carolina—that accuses a number of individuals of terrorism, including twenty-one-year-old Ziyad Yaghi. The trial is expected to last about seven weeks. Project SALAM has been following this case because we believe it may be another example of an unfair prosecution. For this reason, **we are writing to urge you or a representative to attend the trial**. You can read about Yaghi’s situation at <http://www.helptheprisoners.org/index.php?alertid=70&cat=alerts>

We believe that only by observing these trials can fair-minded people decide whether the trials are just and the defendants guilty or innocent. The prosecution typically has had many months to leak one-sided information and present its case in the media, which in turn has cooperated and painted a biased picture of what the evidence will show. But courtroom observers are frequently surprised at the insufficiency of the government’s evidence and the unfair tricks the government uses to win convictions. We have found that when the public shows interest in a trial, the media reporting is more accurate, the government is less likely to play on prejudice, and all communities are better served.

Defendants in “terrorism” trials face daunting obstacles that other defendants do not usually encounter. The government may deploy wholly unwarranted security precautions as a way to prejudice the jury. The accused are often held without bail in solitary confinement for years before coming to trial. The media labels them “supporters of terrorism” and thus they are vilified and pronounced guilty long before they come anywhere near a court of law. At

trial, they may be confronted with secret or classified evidence. They are not given a jury of their peers, rather a jury that may well start with a bias against Muslims. Some defendants, knowing they have no chance of a fair trial in the current climate, accept plea deals for a guaranteed sentence of perhaps fifteen years, rather than gambling with their lives in an unjust trial and receiving a sentence of perhaps seventy years. “Terrorism” trials often lead to condemnation of the Muslim community as a whole and to the impoverishment of the families and children of the accused. Thus it is important for the non-Muslim community to become involved in these trials to ensure that the Muslim community, as well as the defendants and their families, receives support and compassion in this difficult time.

**We hope that you will attend the trial of Ziyad Yaghi and his co-defendants in New Bern, North Carolina on September 19.** Please write to either of us (our e-mail addresses are listed on this letterhead) to confirm the trial’s start date, since court calendars are often changed at the last minute. You can also contact Laila Yaghi, Ziyad’s mother, who can answer any questions you might have; her e-mail address is [laila\\_lois@yahoo.com](mailto:laila_lois@yahoo.com). If you are unable to attend the trial but would still like to help, please consider giving hospitality to people who are coming from out of town to attend the trial, or helping the families of the defendants. In many communities, both Muslims and non-Muslims have formed groups to support the families of Muslim defendants, and have found in their common work ways to build bridges between both religious and secular communities.

At this time of growing Islamophobia, it is especially important to ensure that Muslim defendants receive a fair trial. If the government can bring false charges against Muslims, it can bring false charges against any of us. An attack on one religion can lead to attacks on others. The words of Pastor Martin Niemöller in 1946 are as true today as they were for the 1930s Germany that he spoke of—except here in the United States it is Muslims who are now being persecuted:

“First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew.  
Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

Sincerely,

Steve Downs, Esq.  
Kathy Manley, Esq.  
Attorneys for Project SALAM