



March 20, 2017

## **U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Condemns Recent Hate Incidents and Calls for Federal Action**

In recent weeks, many serious hate crimes have been reported around the country. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is deeply concerned about such attacks. We call on state and federal officials to respond immediately and effectively to end violence based on religion, national origin, race or other identity status.

The Commission notes some of the heinous acts, among many other reported hate incidents, are alleged as follows. In Kansas, an attacker shot two Indian men, killing one, after yelling at them to “get out of [his] country.”<sup>1</sup> In Washington, an attacker shot a Sikh man while saying the victim should “go back” to his own country.<sup>2</sup> Jewish community centers and synagogues across the country have received bomb threats, and Jewish cemeteries have been defiled.<sup>3</sup> Arsonists have set several mosques on fire.<sup>4</sup> In Florida, an attacker yelled homophobic slurs at a gay couple riding bicycles and intentionally struck one of them with his scooter.<sup>5</sup> Although these incidents have not yet been adjudicated or proven to be motivated by bias against particular groups, the reports and description of what took place are more than deeply troubling.

The Commission has long condemned hate incidents including as recently as December 2016.<sup>6</sup> We said then: law enforcement officials must remain vigilant in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. We also emphasized the critical need to collect and report hate crime data and called for sufficient funding for the Department of Justice to accomplish this job. The dire nature of reports of serious hate incidents in the past few weeks compels the Commission to speak again. Our role as a federal civil rights agency is to identify attempts to marginalize and intimidate members of protected groups based

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., “911 Call: Bar Shooting Suspect Said He’d Killed ‘Iranians,’” Associated Press, February 27, 2016, *available at* [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US\\_BAR\\_SHOOTING\\_KANSAS\\_ASOL-?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_BAR_SHOOTING_KANSAS_ASOL-?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., “Sikh man in Kent says he was told, ‘Go back to your own country’ before he was shot,” Seattle Times, March 4, 2017, *available at* <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/kent-shooting-victim-says-he-was-told-go-back-to-your-own-country>.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Michael Rubinkam, “Jewish centers cope with bomb threats; graves vandalized,” Associated Press, February 27, 2017, *available at* <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ab60be7f7f9541d484ce3e3f38abe8a9/money-being-raised-restore-vandalized-jewish-cemetery>.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Holly Yan and Mayra Cuevas, “Spate of mosque fires stretches across the country,” CNN, March 2, 2017 *available at* <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/02/us/mosque-fires-2017>.

<sup>5</sup> “Arrest made in ‘You live in Trump country now’ gay-bashing attack,” Miami Herald, March 1, 2017, *available at* <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/florida-keys/article135654693.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Statement on Hate Crimes in the United States,” December 5, 2016, *available at* <http://www.usccr.gov/press/2016/PR-12-05-16-hate-crimes.pdf>.

on their status. These attacks have caused fear and serious concern in many communities around the country. Hate incidents run counter to the values of inclusion and full participation Americans champion. These actions diminish all Americans and the American way of life.

Once again we condemn these attacks in the strongest terms and call for a robust response from all levels of government. These violent acts and threats motivated by hate must be forcefully discouraged. We must use our influence to prevent further violence, whether it is based on national origin, religion, race, gender identity, or any other protected status. We call on law enforcement authorities to prosecute those responsible wherever the evidence warrants. We join the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and 156 other civil and human rights groups in calling upon the executive branch to respond quickly and forcefully to hate-based incidents.<sup>7</sup> We also join all 100 members of the United States Senate – who specifically addressed threats of anti-Semitism – in urging the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to use all available resources in response to these threats of violence.<sup>8</sup> We echo their call for these agencies to ensure states report hate crimes to the FBI under the Hate Crimes Statistics Act. As the Senators said, hate-motivated threats of violence are "completely unacceptable and un-American."

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon expressed her concern: "No community should have to fear attacks based on how they look, where they are from, whom they love, or what they believe. We must all come together to fight against such hate and intolerance, which has no place in our society."

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with studying and advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about the Commission and our work, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/usccrgov>

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<sup>7</sup> "157 Civil and Human Rights Groups Call for Stronger Responses to Hate Incidents," March 10, 2017, *available at* <http://www.civilrights.org/press/2017/156-Groups-Call-for-Stronger-Response-to-Hate-Incidents.html>.

<sup>8</sup>Letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kelly, Attorney General Sessions, and Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Comey, March 7, 2017, *available at* <https://www.peters.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Final%20JCC%20Letter%20Signed%203.7.17.pdf>.