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Discourse Community Speech Draft 1

Rania:

I would like to begin by giving thanks to all those who made this possible for me. Thank you to the House of Representatives and the individuals who allowed me to come and speak here today. Recently, I witnessed an act of discrimination that reminded me of an event from my childhood years. I was reminded of the time I was walking hand-in-hand with my mother, with her beautiful silk hijab wrapped so neatly on her head. We were minding our business, until a man started walking after us screaming at my mother. Various slurs left his mouth and he angrily repeated to my mother that, “This is America” and that she “couldn’t wear that here.” My mother barely paid him mind and the two of us kept walking, but that moment is one I don’t think I’ll ever forget.

Islamophobia and xenophobia is now common in America. Since the Al-Qaeda attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, this country has turned its back on its Muslim and minority communities. Many people felt unsafe due to the rampant rise in racist, islamophobic and xenophobic sentiments. Hate crimes especially have been at a high. In 2018, the FBI reported an increase in these types of crimes for the third year in a row. Hate crimes rose by 17% in the year 2017. Most of these crimes are motivated by personal biases against an individual’s race, religion or ancestry. Inaccurate and negative media portrayal feeds into this because the public is led to believe that Muslims are violent extremists. Many individuals feed into this negativity, one such

individual being our own president. President Trump has exacerbated the anti-Muslim sentiment since entering the White House upon multiple occasions. From calling Muslims “sick people” to saying that, “Islam hates us. There’s something there that — there’s a tremendous hatred there. There's tremendous hatred,” Trump has definitely not been helping the false narrative being played out in the media.

I’d like to make it clear that while President’s Trump and other hateful words are not particularly hurtful to me despite being a young Muslim woman here in America, they do become tiresome. It gets tiring having to listen to the same “fake news” or information as our president would say himself. I have been a part of the Muslim community here and in my motherland of Egypt, for the entirety of my life. In no place have I ever seen a “sick person” nor have I seen the hate that is so adamantly associated with my religion. Instead, I see kind-hearted folk who go out of their way for their people and communities. I see individuals who greet each other with the phrase, “Peace and blessings be upon you.” The Muslims that live amongst us are not the extremists that all of America both fears and hates.

As I have touched upon so briefly earlier, hate towards the Muslim community is not a new problem. It has been ongoing since 2001, maybe even earlier. Anti-immigrant sentiment has always plagued this country and we can see this throughout history. This problem, this issue can be attributed to a cultural problem here in the United States. There is a culture that excuses violence and hostility towards immigrants and people who are not white Christian males. Why is this? Because there is an entire structure of power that supports this behavior and sentiment. Muslim individuals are the target of 18.7% of religiously motivated hate crimes. While this percentage may seem low, keep in mind that there are currently 3.45 million Muslims living in the United States. Nothing is being done to help these individuals. I am here today to bring

attention to these events and advocate for those who are not in positions of privilege to speak for themselves.

One unfortunate example of a crime against Muslims and humanity was the 2015 Chapel Hill shooting which resulted in the deaths of Deah Shaddy Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha. These young Muslim individuals were killed execution style in their own home. While some may have forgotten of this event, I have not. After the Chapel Hill shootings, many non-profit organizations advocated for their cause and spoke up against the injustices that occurred. One such organization is CAIR, the Council on American-Islamic Relations. CAIR volunteers include lawyers, businesspeople, professors, doctors, teachers, engineers, and entrepreneurs. These individuals vow to protect and represent Muslims in America and “regularly participate in interfaith dialogue and are part of civic advocacy and human rights coalitions.” At the time of the Chapel Hill shootings, CAIR pushed for the law enforcement to seek motive in the taking of these innocent lives. Overall, the organization, along with many others, tries its best to combat the stereotypes about Muslims and shed a positive light.

I strive to do the same. Once again, thank you for your time.