



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

LETITIA JAMES  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

DIVISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE  
CIVIL RIGHTS BUREAU

April 1, 2022

**VIA USPS**

Attorney General Merrick Garland  
Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta  
Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Kristen Clarke  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

**Re: Investigative Project on Terrorism's spying campaign against Muslims**

Dear Attorney General Garland, Associate Attorney General Gupta, and Assistant Attorney General Clarke:

According to recent news reports, the Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT), a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit, spied on Muslim religious and civil rights organizations for over a decade.<sup>1</sup> IPT's private espionage campaign reportedly targeted high-profile Muslim religious leaders, a Muslim member of Congress, and nearly every prominent Muslim advocacy group in the United States. Those targeted included Muslim New Yorkers and at least one New York house of worship. Because of our serious concerns about this apparent interference with Muslim civil rights, the New York State Office of the Attorney General (NYAG) respectfully requests that the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigate whether the IPT's actions violated federal criminal and civil rights law.

For over a decade, the IPT's spies reportedly infiltrated Muslim organizations, recorded confidential conversations, and disclosed confidential emails. IPT reportedly employed Romin Iqbal, the leader of the Council on American-Islamic Relation's Ohio chapter, to leak confidential documents and recordings in possible violation of his fiduciary duties. IPT also reportedly paid more than \$100,000 to Virginia resident Tariq Nelson to record confidential conversations without other participants' knowledge. Statements from Nelson and another individual allegedly involved in the spying suggest that IPT intended to hamper Muslims in the

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Michelle Boorstein & Hannah Allam, "A cryptic email, then a confession: How a Muslim group uncovered moles." *Washington Post*, Jan. 12, 2022; Hannah Allam & Anjjuman Ali, "He was a Muslim group leader. For 13 years, he allegedly spied for an anti-Muslim organization." *Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 2021; Danae King, "CAIR, over 80 Muslim organizations call for federal investigation into spies." *The Columbus Dispatch*, Feb. 1, 2022.

exercise of their civil rights, including the right to worship, to peacefully assemble, to petition the government, and to register members of their community to vote.

The NYAG and the DOJ share a mission to spare Muslims from unlawful discrimination and intimidation. The IPT's spying campaign has unsettled Muslims in New York and across the country, undermined bonds of trust, and raised the legitimate fear that Muslims can no longer practice their faith in peace.<sup>2</sup> The NYAG has already instructed the IPT to cease and desist any illegal harassment or intimidations of Muslims in the State of New York. Our office stands ready to enforce the law. A DOJ investigation into IPT's possible violations of federal law would send the message that the federal government will also use its powers to protect Muslims' rights.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to seeing what a DOJ investigation will uncover.

Sincerely,

/s/ Rick Sawyer

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Hannan Adley, "For NJ Muslims, new spying scandal comes as no surprise after years of surveillance." *NorthJersey.com*, Jan. 28, 2022.