

NEWS CONFERENCE REMARKS

Council of American –Islamic Relations

By Russ Florence, chairman, Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice

Good morning. My name is Russ Florence. I'm a business owner here in Oklahoma City. Today I am here in my role as chairman of the board for the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice – a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to promote respect and understanding of all races, religions and cultures.

Yesterday, OCCJ held its annual Oklahoma City Humanitarian Awards. We recognized five community leaders who exemplify our mission; who are carrying the banner for social justice.

Included in this prestigious group of honorees was Imam Enchassi, whose work ... whose peaceful demeanor ... whose love of all mankind ... serves as an example for all people, of all faiths. He is the embodiment of kindness.

Likewise, we enjoy a strong relationship with Adam Soltani, whom you heard from earlier. Adam is a good man, and a good friend to me, personally. And Sheryl Siddiqui, who daily fights for justice, not only for Muslims, but for people of all religions.

And so many others ...

I count many Muslims as dear friends, and have traveled in countries where Islam is the primary faith. They are, without a doubt, some of the most peaceful, grounded, loving people I know.

So it's heartbreaking to hear such hateful remarks – remarks that are not only untrue; but serve no purpose other than to ignite fear, and divide people, and incite hatred.

It's sad. As Oklahomans, we're better than that. And from our elected officials, we expect better. We expect statesmanship. We expect leadership. And above all, we expect honor.

The comments from last week show us once again that bullying doesn't just happen on the playground. And it doesn't just happen among children. It happens among adults – even among people with power ... in our halls of government.

On behalf of people from all faiths – Christians, Jews, Muslims and many others – and all races, and backgrounds – and all political parties – we proudly stand behind our American Muslim friends, and invite others to join us.