

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations



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Secretary Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Attorney General Eric Holder
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

July 29, 2011

Dear Secretary Napolitano and Attorney General Holder,

I write to you as the denominational head of the Unitarian Universalist Association, on behalf of more than 1,000 congregations across the country, urging immediate action to quell the growing human rights crisis in Arizona.

As someone who has witnessed firsthand the abuses taking place in the name of so-called law enforcement, I request that the Department of Homeland Security immediately sever Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's access to immigration programs like 287(g) and Secure Communities. I also request that the Department of Justice conclude its ongoing investigation into abuses by the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and bring Sheriff Arpaio to justice.

A year ago today, our Unitarian Universalist principle on the inherent worth and dignity of all people led me to Phoenix to participate in a National Day of Non-Compliance in protest of SB 1070. Along with others, I chose to engage in an act of civil disobedience in front of the Maricopa County jail. In blocking the entrance of Sheriff Joe Arpaio's jail, I sought to impede -- if only for one day -- the Sheriff's dehumanization of migrants, his raids on barrios, and his campaign of terror. After fourteen hours in jail, I was able to leave freely and return to my family. Others in Maricopa County jail were less fortunate.

Following my arrest, I led an effort to bring together seven other denominations and a dozen faith-based organizations in signing a letter to President Obama urging an end to policies like the frightening "Secure Communities" program that "Arizonify" local law police by requiring them to enforce unjust federal immigration laws. These programs criminalize immigrant communities, sanction racial profiling, and tear apart families. Our letter was delivered in February to the

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Department of Homeland Security. Unfortunately, Secretary Janet Napolitano, there has been no action in response.

I am thankful that the Department of Justice launched an investigation into Sheriff Arpaio's actions, and I am hopeful that upon completion, the Sheriff will be held accountable for his crimes. But justice delayed is justice denied. The Department of Justice investigation has been a slow process. Attorney General Holder, I am not an investigator or a civil rights attorney. I appreciate that finding evidence requires due process. But as a minister who cares deeply about the suffering of other people — people whose freedom exists at the whim of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, a man who has shown himself to thrive on cruelty — I ask you, Attorney General Holder, to please bring Sheriff Arpaio to justice swiftly.

There are approximately 8,000 inmates in Sheriff Arpaio's jail cells, many of whom have been victims of policies that have been deemed unconstitutional. Whether firsthand or on television, we have all witnessed Sheriff Arpaio's cruelty:

- We witnessed – on reality television – Sheriff Arpaio raid a man's house with a tank, turning terror into sport viewing entertainment.
- We saw the prisoners in the tent city subjected to both snow and unimaginable heat.
- We watched as Sheriff Arpaio was forced to settle racial profiling suits, and fire his underlings for their overreach and intimidation.
- In the past year, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a ruling that Sheriff Arpaio has repeatedly violated the constitutional rights of detainees by housing them in overcrowded conditions, at "dangerously high temperatures," and feeding them "overripe, moldy, and generally inedible" food.
- All the while, as you know, Sheriff Arpaio has defied numerous federal investigations into his conduct.

Sheriff Arpaio, who years ago said he thinks it's an "honor" to be called KKK, and referred to his own tent city as a "concentration camp," is not only still in power, but is also empowered by the Department of Homeland Security.

Secretary Napolitano, please stop people's suffering in Arizona today with one simple action. By immediately cutting the Sheriff's access to immigration programs like Secure Communities and 287(g), you can prevent injustice today. You have the legal authority and moral obligation to act, particularly because you know firsthand what is happening in your hometown.

To bear witness to human rights violations and not take action is to be implicated in the injustice. There is a domestic human rights crisis in Phoenix. I have seen it firsthand, and I am compelled to act.

One year later to the day, as I appear in court to answer for my deeds, little has changed to make Maricopa County more like the America I believe in. Instead, much has happened to make our

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country more and more like Maricopa County. Secretary Napolitano, you continue to replicate and expand policies born in Arizona; and in the process, DHS has made the entire federal government – and potentially all of us – into accomplices for Joe Arpaio’s crimes. Every day our federal government continues its contract with Joe Arpaio is a day in which it condones injustice. And every day we fail to stop dehumanization, we put our own humanity at risk.

Whether we all gaze upon Arizona and become desensitized to suffering and dehumanization, or whether we take action is not just a test for our federal government, it is a test for us all. Simply put, we all stand at a crossroads, and we must work to turn the tide from hate to human rights. It has been a personal decision by me and a denominational decision by the Unitarian Universalist Association to stand on the side of love because, in Arizona, there is no longer any such thing as neutrality.

Our efforts and the efforts of our partners in the faith community will not cease.

Next June, almost two years after the passage of SB 1070, we will bring thousands of people of faith to Arizona to shine a light on the human rights crisis that is taking place. We will stand with the communities in defense of their and our barrios because we cannot be neutral. We are called. We are all Arizona.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Morales". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the text "In faith,".

The Rev. Peter Morales
President, Unitarian Universalist Association