



COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS CITY OF CHICAGO

STATEMENT BY MONA NORIEGA, CHAIR AND COMMISSIONER OF THE CHICAGO COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS TO THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RELATIONS IN SUPPORT OF ALD. SCOTT WAGUESPACK'S (32) RESOLUTION AGAINST HATE SPEECH

Good Morning Chairman Dowell and members of the Human Relations Committee. My name is Mona Noriega, and I serve as the Chair and Commissioner of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. As you know, the Commission is the civil rights agency for the City of Chicago. We enforce the Chicago Human Rights and Fair Housing Ordinances and its protections against discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and bonding. We investigate and adjudicate complaints of discrimination based on 16 protected classes such as race, sex, religion, and sexual orientation. The Commission also assists victims of hate crimes, mediates community tensions, and delivers educational workshops on a variety of human relations topics including bullying, prejudice reduction, conflict resolution.

I come before you to unequivocally express the Commission's support of this very important and timely resolution. It is sad that in 2016, we would even need to entertain such a resolution in Chicago, or anywhere else in this country. However, given the current climate many of our own residents, as are others across the country, are in a state of fear.

The United States of America has always held itself out to the world as a nation for all people, a bastion of freedom. A nation where others may come to escape persecution, a nation that is accepting of all people who are willing to pull up their bootstraps and work hard to support themselves and their families. Here in Chicago, we have long embodied these principles. We are proud to say that we are a city of immigrants. We look with pride to diversity of our city, the unique characteristics of our neighborhoods, and the personal stamp of every group that has come here.

But, we also know the most recent rhetoric feeds the bigoted appetites of those who look for any excuse to act out hate. In 2001, following the terrorists' attacks of September 11, so called patriotic Americans used the opportunity to attack anyone who appeared to be Arab or Muslim. In the two weeks following 9/11 there were 50 reported hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in Chicago, when typically we may see maybe 3-4 in a year. The level of hate was so strong, many Arab and Muslim families kept their children home from school. Husbands urged their wives not to leave their homes, even to go to the grocery store. In one attack, a Latino woman was beaten because the perpetrator thought she was Arab. We do not want to see this played out again in our city. It was a painful time, a dangerous time, and an embarrassing time for the city.

While they came for Arabs and Muslims in 2001, our history tells us that hate speech has been used for decades to control, kill, and justify genocide. The Jewish community understands the importance of remembering the tragedy of the Holocaust, vowing that it will never happen again as a call to be vigilant in responding to any new source of hate. Hate speech also stirs troubling memories for African Americans who know how it was used to whip up white crowds into frenzy before carrying out horrendous lynchings. Hate filled tirades have been used, and continue to be used to incite vulnerable individuals to act out their aggression towards gays, lesbians, and the transgender community. And lest we forget, hate speech, designed in the guise of national security was used to force Japanese Americans into internment camps.

In closing, let me say that it is critical that we support this resolution. The Mayor has already re-affirmed the status of the City of Chicago as a Sanctuary City and our commitment to the value of inclusion. As a city we must take a united stand to ensure the people of Chicago that hate will not be tolerated against any group, and that we will stand together to fight any form of bigotry, discrimination, or hate from whatever the source. Thank you.