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Newt Gingrich  
Newt 2012 HQ  
P.O. Box 550769  
Atlanta, GA 30355

January 29, 2012

### Re: Recent Remarks Regarding Muslim Candidates

Dear Mr. Gingrich:

As a national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society in the United States, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) writes to express our deep concerns over your statement at a town hall meeting in West Columbia, South Carolina. We ask that you publicly apologize for your remarks in order to ensure that intolerance and xenophobia have no place in public discourse.

On January 17, 2011, when asked by a town hall attendee whether you would support a Muslim running for President, you responded, "A truly modern person who happened to worship Allah would not be a threat. A person who belonged to any kind of belief in Sharia, any kind of effort to impose that on the rest of us, would be a mortal threat." You continued, "I think it would depend entirely on whether they would commit in public to give up Sharia."<sup>1</sup>

Your most recent statements raise serious concerns because they paint an entire community as disloyal simply based upon their religious background. By proclaiming that a potential Muslim-American candidate would need to take additional steps, namely denouncing Sharia, that other non-Muslim candidates would not perpetuates the dangerous notion that one should be treated differently as a result of one's faith. The underlying message is that if an individual is Muslim that they are not fit to run for office unless they take extra measures as it relates to his or her faith. Particularly because this is not the first time that you have made remarks disparaging the Muslim community<sup>2</sup>, we urge you to issue an apology for these statements.

When xenophobia and racism permeate the political sphere, there can be far-reaching consequences. Xenophobic rhetoric made by political and public figures can foster similar sentiments on the part of the public, and perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes. It can also influence support for policies and practices that target or harm people of color and immigrants. Finally, such rhetoric can further feelings of marginalization and hamper political and civic participation for immigrants and communities of color.

Over the past ten years, SAALT has observed an alarming increase in insensitive and xenophobic statements in political discourse. SAALT has compiled a range of comments and statements targeting South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in its report, ***From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse***.<sup>3</sup> As South Asians seek to become more involved in American life, we hope that

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks can be viewed here: [http://www.youtube.com/embed/ZVnBN\\_JTLy4](http://www.youtube.com/embed/ZVnBN_JTLy4).

<sup>2</sup> Remarks from June 13, 2011 debate regarding Muslims and Nazis, available at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/gop-debate-newt-gingrichs-comparison-muslims-nazis-sparks/story?id=13838355>.

<sup>3</sup> Report available at <http://saalt.org/attachments/1/From%20Macacas%20to%20Turban%20Toppers%20Report.small.pdf>

elected officials, policymakers, and civic leaders will promote an environment that welcomes the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences rather than one that condones xenophobia. We call upon your office to ensure that there is no place for intolerance in the political sphere and retract and apologize for your comments. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you to provide further information about the South Asian community. Please feel free to contact our Policy Director, Priya Murthy, at 301-270-1855 or via email at [priya@saalt.org](mailto:priya@saalt.org).

Sincerely,



Deepa Iyer, Esq.  
Executive Director



Priya Murthy, Esq.  
Policy Director