



Written by [James Heiser](#) on August 20, 2012

State Department Teaching “Women’s Rights” to Imams

A story from CNSNews reveals that the U.S. Department of State has once again undertaken the dubious task of trying to reform Islam to fit the department’s international agenda. According to an August 10 report released by the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 450 imams were the target of the most recent effort, which aimed to combat “gender-based violence” which has been linked to Islam.



Word of the new State Department program came to light roughly two years after the department was engaged in a public controversy centered on the Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, who was engaged in an effort to build an Islamic center near the site of the September 11, 2001, attack in New York City. On August 10, 2010, a story for FoxNews.com (“[Group: State Department Is Wrong to Sponsor Imam Trip](#)”), the State Department was busy paying for a junket which would take Rauf to several Middle Eastern countries:

The State Department confirmed Tuesday that the administration is sponsoring Feisal Abdul Rauf’s trip to Qatar, Bahrain and the [United Arab Emirates](#), which is described as part of a program to send Muslims abroad to educate other countries about the role of religion in the [United States](#). Rauf made similar trips during the [Bush administration](#).

Rauf and his partners are preparing to build a \$100 million Islamic center and mosque near Ground Zero, the site of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks that left nearly 3,000 dead.

Plans for Rauf’s junket at the expense of American taxpayers led to protests from the American Center for Law and Justice; the organization’s chief counsel, Jay Sekulow, was quoted by FoxNews as noting the offensive character of the State Department’s action during the midst of the Ground Zero Mosque controversy: “This shows a tremendous lack of judgment on behalf of the State Department; and for the American taxpayers to be funding this global journey is not only wrong, but deeply offensive ... It seems with each passing day we learn more disturbing information about this project and the people behind it. We demand that the State Department put a halt to the Imam’s participation in this publicly funded trip.”

Now, [according to CNSNews](#), the State Department is involved in a massive “educational” endeavor which is aimed at guiding Muslim imams to start teaching the compatibility of “women’s rights” and Islamic doctrine:

As part of its effort to combat “gender-based violence,” the U.S. State Department has trained 450 Muslim leaders (imams), using a curriculum focusing on the “compatibility of women’s rights and Islam,” according to a report released on Friday....

The U.S. government defines gender-based violence as violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or how a person is perceived to follow socially



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defined norms of masculinity and femininity.

The State Department says such violence includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation.

Millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars are poured into the effort: For FY 2013, the State Department and USAID requested \$147.1 million for programs addressing gender-based violence worldwide, an increase of approximately \$30 million over the FY 2012 request of \$117.2 million.

The existence of the training program was detailed in a published report, and CNSNews explains that the program is the direct result of a presidential directive: “The report, “[United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally](#),” was released by the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on Aug. 10, after President Barack Obama issued an [executive order](#) instructing government agencies to come up with a ‘multi-year strategy that will more effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally.’”

[According to the official report](#): “In Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor supported a program that promoted women’s rights by training 450 imams using a curriculum on the compatibility of women’s rights and Islam.” And the report sought to justify the expenditure of training hundreds of foreign imams in the virtues of the State Department’s knowledge of the Quran by offering a smattering of astoundingly vague anecdotes, including the following:

Community members in the focus groups agreed that most imams have been speaking out about women’s rights in Islam, women’s inheritance rights, and condemning violence against women.

In some communities, wives of imams trained in the curriculum were using it to educate women in their communities of their rights.

It is difficult to come to any meaningful understanding of what is being taught to the imams — or what they are teaching others — on the basis of such platitudes. What is clear is that America’s latest experiment in “nation-building” — the perpetually-failed state of Afghanistan — is no beacon for the State Department’s reinterpretation of Islam; as CNSNews observed:

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has endorsed a “code of conduct” issued by a council of clerics that allows husbands to beat their wives in certain cases and encourages segregation of the sexes. The rules also say women should not travel without a male guardian and they should not mingle with strange men in places like schools, markets or offices.

Asked about the code of conduct at a press conference five months ago, Karzai said it was in line with Islamic law: “It is the Shariah law of all Muslims and all Afghans,” the AP quoted him as saying.

Karzai’s public backing of the repressive guidelines apparently was intended to pave the way for negotiations with the hardline Taliban.

It is hardly surprising that promoting a version of Islam which hardly exists outside of executive orders and State Department briefings is unlikely to have much of an influence within genuinely Islamic communities. American presidents and secretaries of state are rarely models of theological erudition — an observation which is especially true when the doctrine they promote runs counter to the received traditions of the religion’s adherents.

Photo of Muslim women: AP Images



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