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Talk at the Lake Merritt United Methodist Church, Oakland CA

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Deepest thanks to the organizers of this timely evening of solidarity. My deepest gratitude also goes to them, particularly to Reverend Michael Yoshii, for inviting me to speak.

This expression of solidarity carries a number of important meanings. The support it intends to extend to Muslims, in general, and to the people of Palestine, in particular, as symbolized by the town of Wadi Foquin cannot be underestimated. However, the timing of putting this event together cannot be traced to coincidence and/or arbitrary planning. It is perfectly understood, and actually much appreciated, that people who are here tonight did decline to be somewhere else, say in the nation's capital for any celebration.

As is well known, today marks the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States, who is believed to be the most unpopular and most protested in US history. On many fronts, the Presidency of Donald J. Trump is expected to be the most troubled and also most troubling for the American people and for the world at large. For now, suffice it to say that the new President takes office at a moment when the country is polarized in a most unprecedented way.

In his effort to become President, Donald Trump evoked and appealed to bigotry and hostility against Mexicans, women, the disabled, babies, and above all, Muslims. The main hallmark of Trump's election campaign centered on raising anti-Muslim sentiments and inciting against Muslims, whether here at home or abroad as possible immigrants and/or visitors to the United States and to other countries.

As a friend of mine and I were talking about elections during the campaign, my friend confidently stressed that one of Trump's major problems is that he does not like M&M's. Astonished, I asked my friend: "First, how on earth do you know that Trump does not like M&M's, and second, what relevance does this have for our discussion?" My friend, who is African-American, said that M&M's stand for Mexicans and Muslims, and by extension blacks, since such people like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the late Muhammad Ali and other African-American figures are Muslims.

For ordinary Muslims in the United States, exacerbating a xenophobic and Islamophobic environment meant nothing less than more widely spreading the practice of hatred, discrimination and blatant hostility against their family members at the work place, in school and on the street. Incidents of prejudice and attacks on Muslims have increased tremendously during the election campaign, in great part due to the heightened level of irresponsible rhetoric by Donald Trump. Examples of anti-Muslim conduct have become quite concerning even for some policy-makers. During the confirmation hearing of Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions for the Attorney General position, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar expressed alarm at what some Muslims are experiencing in some American neighborhoods. With emotions which she could not hide, Sen. Klobuchar informed Sen. Sessions of the details of what one Muslim-American family had to endure while eating out at a restaurant. Perhaps motivated by the widespread anti-Muslim sentiment, a stranger approaches the table where this family was having dinner and threateningly orders the four, the couple and their two children, to pack up and go home. According to Sen. Klobuchar, one of the children, a daughter, started crying: "Mommy, but you promised us not to have dinner at home and to go out to

eat.” As the Senator remarked, the only home this child knows is their home in Minnesota where she was born. Little did she know that this bigot was so racist, so much so that he did not think that a Muslim family could have their home here in the US like everybody else.

Our message to Trump can go as follows: Mr. President, you have rightly criticized the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 because it was irresponsible to do so. You have been right on target in drawing attention to the fact that the reckless policies of the United States, whether in Iraq, Syria or Libya, have led to the creation of a terrorist organization like ISIS. You have been forthrightly correct in referring to the corporate media as the most dishonest people.

Following your logic to its fullest conclusion should lead to understanding that a policy of banning all Muslims from entry into the United States and/or compiling a registry of all Muslims living here in the US will be even more irresponsible, more counter-productive and more detrimental to US security, if carried out. Do not rely on the same shortsightedness in your domestic policy which you have criticized in others’ foreign policy.

We can all join you in the struggle against extremism, regardless of its color, religion, ethnicity and/or nationality, be it Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and even your own, as crystallized in many of your statements, but only if and when you stop being sensational, selective and flagrantly stereotypical. Historians will also consider your injurious statements and positions against so many communities, but mainly Muslims, as detrimental to the security and reputation of the United States. As you have been critical of earlier misguided and misleading US policies which have culminated in the incubation of extremism in the Middle East, it is imperative for you, Mr. President, to know that your incitement and categorical prejudice against Muslims in America can turn many towards radicalization and extremism. In other words, Mr. President, the security you claim to achieve can be hampered by the very tools you propose to use which you have already criticized in another setting.

Mr. President, if you think that there are some people who complain about the so-called Islamophobia, it shouldn’t come as surprising news to you that there are a lot more people, both here at home and abroad, who consider Trumpophobia or the Trump syndrome as their biggest problem at this stage.

Rather than espousing policies of alienation of law-abiding Muslims and discrimination against them, we expect you to advocate for their further assimilation and integration in American society. Security cannot be the product of deepening frustration and the consequent leaning towards radicalization by those who are discriminated against, but rather by the optimization of inclusion. Muslims and Arabs become quite concerned when they hear some members of your team during transition speaking of the possibility of creating a registry for all Muslims and for invoking the outrageously unlawful internment of Japanese-Americans as a precedent to be followed in the case of the more than 3 million Muslim-Americans.

The stories of discrimination, hatred and actual harm are real and are too many to enumerate. The atmosphere created is so conducive to heightening the level of racism. Therefore, my friends, now is the time to act, to come together and form a protective shield for the most basic human values of equal coexistence under the law. The moment is ours to seize because this is the time when support and solidarity are most needed. The Muslims of America do not have to put up with uncertainty and fear of the unknown. It is your responsibility and mine to ensure that all law-abiding citizens are to be treated fairly and with dignity and for Muslims to be treated as first-class citizens.

Sadly, if Muslim-Americans have been subjected to enormous fear and anxiety, the concerns of the people of Palestine have become more serious than ever before. It is taken for granted that US foreign policy is biased against the Palestinian people and in favor of the Israelis. It is an established fact that the brutal Israeli occupation of Palestine would not have been sustained without US military, political, economic and diplomatic backing. The people of Palestine are well aware of the extent of American support of the Israeli occupation regime, even to the extent of often succumbing to Israeli dictates, intimidation and provocation.

However, Donald Trump promises to be even more attuned to the most extremist Israeli policies than any US president before him. For one thing, his commitment to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is only believed to fuel an already tense atmosphere between Palestinians and Israelis. This move, if implemented, will undoubtedly result in more bloodshed and in the prolongation of an already intractable conflict. In addition, Trump's appointment of the New York bankruptcy lawyer, David Friedman, who happens to be to the right of Netanyahu, as US ambassador to Israel will bring even more bankruptcy to US policy in the Middle East. Friedman is known to be a devout supporter of Israeli settlement building in the West Bank and to already have a home in Jerusalem. Such is also the appointment by Trump of his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who is known for his rightist orthodox views, as his advisor in the White House, and as possible envoy to supposedly broker peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Such appointments and others have led some commentators to remark that the Trump Administration promises to be more Israeli than the Netanyahu government itself.

In effect, we are to expect an intensification of Israeli land confiscation and the building of more illegal ugly settlements. In essence, this calls for more determined support and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The town of Wadi Foquin which is located to the southwest of Bethlehem is a beautiful agricultural village which usually contributes to economic life and activities in the Bethlehem district as a whole. It has been the target of fierce land confiscation and destruction of its farms. No one has been more active in promoting the cause of this deserving town than Reverend Michael Yoshii. He has brought representatives of this town on speaking tours here in the US and has impressively taken the cause of this town, as a microcosmic representation of the question of Palestine, to the halls of Washington DC. No one has been more methodical in extending support to this town as has Rev. Yoshii.

Therefore, let this day also mark the most instrumental form of moral and legal support of Muslim-Americans, as well as moral and financial support of the Palestinian people, as represented by the town of Wadi Foquin. We are called upon to contribute everything we can to help support the people of this peaceful town to steadfast and persevere against Israeli settler atrocities.

In the face of bigotry and prejudice, this is the time for us to stand together, as one voice calling for justice and equality. At a time when the regime of occupation and colonization gets a boost by virtue of Trump's statements, policies and appointments, let us here, from this hall, from this meeting, underscore our message of support and backing in the strongest way possible. Let us all commit ourselves to BDS, boycotting the occupation regime, divesting from its economic projects and imposing sanctions on its institutions so as to advance the cause of peace and justice. My brothers and sisters, let us believe in the power of our collective action. Let us realize our goals even against adversity. Let us all together make sure that historians will not document that the

people of America did not resist the rising wave of discrimination and injustice. My brothers and sisters, let us seize the moment and loudly declare from here with one voice that Muslims will be treated justly, that Palestine will be free and that the serene town of Wadi Foquin will be restored to its normalcy once and for all. The call is ours to make. The moment is ours not to let go. The causes we are devoting ourselves to necessitate our strongest commitment.

Thank you and God bless you.