

Government says religious contacts have improved security: Cooperation of Muslim and Arab communities noted

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Five years after the September 11 terrorist attacks, officials from the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice say they're working more with Muslim, Sikh and Arab communities to improve relations and address matters of safety and civil rights.

"Our country is more secure today because law enforcement and America's Arab, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian communities are working more closely together," said Daniel Sutherland, officer for civil rights and civil liberties at the Department of Homeland Security at a mid-September forum in Washington.

Brett Hovington, director of community outreach for the FBI, said he hopes that relations will continue to improve so that people at the grass-roots level are willing to share information that might be helpful in terrorism-related investigations.

"They can be engaged with their government," he said. "They can still be who they are. They can still practice the religion that they want to practice. But it's up to everyone to take a responsibility in fighting the war on terrorism."

Ahmed Younis, national director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, cited town hall forums at mosques and other locations as ways to build partnerships between Muslims and law enforcement officials. But he also noted the difference in their roles. "We are not law enforcement experts," he said. "We are experts in counterextremism. We are experts in . . . fighting bad theology with good theology."

Muslim and Sikh leaders said after the forum that meetings in Washington and across the country with authorities have enabled them to bring up specific concerns,

from profiling to requests that Sikh men remove their turbans during airport security checks.

“We might not always agree, but at least they see our point of view,” said Imam Mohamed Magid of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society in Sterling, Virginia. –*Religion News Service*