

FBI erred in targeting interfaith center

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [October 19, 2010](#) issue

A Department of Justice inspector concluded that the FBI improperly targeted for surveillance some U.S. advocacy organizations, including the Thomas Merton Center, an interfaith group focused on nonviolence.

"We found that the FBI's investigations related to the Merton Center and its statements describing the basis for that investigation raised the most troubling issues in this review," stated the report issued September 20 by the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General.

FBI surveillance of an antiwar rally sponsored by the Pittsburgh-based center was the subject of "inaccurate and misleading information," the report said. As a result, FBI Director Robert Mueller incorrectly testified about the center at a congressional hearing.

The report said the surveillance of the 2002 rally was the result of an "ill-conceived" assignment given to a probationary agent on a "slow work day" to determine if terrorism suspects might be in attendance.

The board president of the Merton Center told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that he found it "extraordinary and unbelievable" that the 209-page report focused so much on his center.

"To mention us in the same sentence as 'terrorism' is an outrage," said Michael Drohan. "Everything we do and have done is to stop war, prevent war and promote economic and social justice. They really owe the Merton Center a profound apology for incriminating us."

FBI spokesman

Chris Allen said the FBI was pleased with the report's conclusion that groups were not targeted because of their "First Amendment activities." He said the FBI is still mulling a recommendation to consider possible action against individuals involved in the "bad information" that resulted in Mueller's erroneous testimony. —*RNS*