

U.S. disputes claim that Islam is invalid faith

by [Whitney Jones](#) in the [November 16, 2010](#) issue

Islam is a valid religion that is entitled to constitutional protection, says a U.S. attorney who stepped into a debate about a proposed mosque and Islamic center in Tennessee.

"To suggest that Islam is not a religion is quite simply ridiculous," said U.S. Attorney Jerry Martin of Nashville in a statement October 18. "Each branch of the federal government has independently recognized Islam as one of the major religions of the world."

Martin's statement comes after a group of landowners in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, filed suit to stop construction of a 52,000-square-foot mosque and Muslim community center in Rutherford County.

Opponents questioned Islam's validity as a religion that's entitled to First Amendment protection. They also claimed that county officials did not inform the public in advance of the county commission meeting at which the plans for the center were approved.

The U.S. Department of Justice filed a brief in the lawsuit warning Rutherford County officials that refusing to recognize Islam as a religion and denying Muslims religious land use rights would violate civil rights laws.

"A mosque is quite plainly a place of worship, and the county rightly recognized that it had an obligation to treat mosques the same as churches, synagogues or any other religious assemblies," said Thomas Perez, assistant attorney general for civil

rights, in a statement from the Department of Justice.

Federal

officials are continuing an arson investigation at the site of the proposed Islamic center after construction equipment was set ablaze in August. —RNS