

Opposition grows to religious freedom nominee

by [Omar Sacirbey](#)

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) More than 1,800 people have signed a petition asking Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to "reconsider" his appointment of Zuhdi Jasser, a prominent critic of U.S. Muslims, to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

"How can an individual who supports the curbing of Muslim civil and religious liberties at home be trusted as a 'commissioner' to review and analyze violations of religious freedoms abroad?" the petition writers ask in their appeal.

Jasser, a physician in Phoenix, Ariz., and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, has angered many Muslim Americans for his work with groups they say demonize Muslims, and for supporting policies that they say infringe on their civil liberties.

Jasser narrated "The Third Jihad," a documentary widely considered to be Islamophobic, and sits on the board of The Clarion Fund, which funded the film, and has received funding from organizations with anti-Islamic sentiments. He has also defended the New York City Police Department against attacks that it spied on Muslims, and testified on Capitol Hill on the problem of Muslim "extremism" in the U.S.

The petition is sponsored by www.Islamophobiatoday.com.

"A man who breeds fear and hate of any people, cannot possibly serve as an unbiased contributor to a commission dedicated to religious freedom," wrote Saosan Suhrawardye, in a comment explaining his signature.

Jasser denounced the attacks as "a defamation campaign," and has also garnered support. "I would defy any of those spreading those smears to look my children in the eye after we say prayers or read the Quran and say such nonsense," Jasser said.

Anne Taylor, a Christian Scientist who with Jasser sits on the board of the Arizona Interfaith Movement, said she was "deeply saddened about the bad press" Jasser had received. "Dr. Jasser is not only well informed and a clear speaker on issues of international concern, but also just a genuinely good person," she said.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is an independent watchdog panel that makes recommendations to Congress, the White House and the State Department. Its nine unpaid commissioners are appointed by the president and Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress.