



# MUSLIM CONSULTATIVE NETWORK

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7/19/07

Dear Editor:

Many community members share serious concerns about ADL. But contrary to the recent Aramica cover story, the recent ADL letter of support for the Khalil Gibran International Academy does not indicate that the ADL is involved with the project. It is disappointing that a community newspaper would publish such a one-sided and unfounded story without checking the facts first with Ms. Almontaser.

Our understanding is that KGIA is developing its own curriculum and also working with the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding on anti-bias matters. However, given that the KGIA is a public school with a mandated NYS curriculum and not a charter school, the Department of Education communicates with a variety of community organizations including the ADL. Many New York City officials see ADL in its civil liberties role and are not sufficiently aware of its problematical stance on Foreign Policy.

Arab and Muslim community members are free to send a message that ADL involvement is unacceptable; but certainly we could do this without unfairly targeting Ms Almontaser. Besides being an educator and effective speaker, Debbie Almontaser has been a long-time advocate for Muslim and Arab communities in New York City, instrumental in the establishment of Arab Heritage Week and developing SABA, the Yemeni American Association. She is also a leader of integrity in interfaith dialogue, an advocate for detainee rights, and has a long list of selfless service to the communities of NYC.

Perceiving a symbol of multicultural education, the extreme Right has already attacked the Khalil Gibran International Academy. When Islamophobe Daniel Pipes attacked Debbie Almontaser this spring, and after the New York Sun placed her picture and its smears against her as a continuous link to its main page, there was little outcry from Arab American newspapers. This was disappointing.

It was also discouraging to see this sensationalistic Aramica article being distributed at this year's Arab Heritage Week. Since Ms. Almontaser is a founder of Arab Heritage Week, this appeared to some of us to be a personal attack as well as an effort to sell newspapers. Let us hope it was not meant in this negative way. Surely, Arab Americans do not need more divisiveness! And based on misunderstanding!

Muslim and Arab dialogue with organizations including ADL may help separate Jewish

**organizations (or at least the more reasonable staff members) from the most extreme and very powerful forces that demonize us as Muslims and Arabs. For example, groups like Ishmael-Isaac (of which Debbie Almontaser is not a member) link some members of ADC and ADL.**

**Lines of communication to the “powers that be” should not and must not lead to cooptation or "selling out", but dialogue can reduce extreme demonization and also the risk of violent confrontation in our own backyard. That is important. We should not cynically imagine that Arabs and Muslims will inevitably be corrupted, singing Kumbayah in three part harmony with ADL.**

**As a colleague I am confident that Ms. Almontaser has not compromised her personal principles or her current role as a Department of Education employee. And I hope none of us, including Aramica, will compromise the values that support a strong and unified community. Community leaders (including publishers) should build trust and respectful discussion and not let fear and mistrust rule the day.**

**Sincerely,  
Adem Carroll  
Muslim Consultative Network**