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I view with growing dismay the prejudice, stereotyping and mistrust directed toward our Muslim brothers and sisters in this country. Citizens of this great country should not be silent while our fellow Americans suffer disrespect and anger as well as verbal and even physical violence. We can recall former times when many Americans were suspicious of Jews, and eras when Catholics were considered a threat. Similarly, people who immigrated from Ireland, Germany, Italy and China have all been viewed as a danger to our society. We can remember all too painfully the internment of Japanese citizens during World War II. In all these cases, the fear and mistrust turned out to be groundless. The same truth must now be seen and affirmed about followers of Islam. Only a small handful of extremists pose a threat to our society—not unlike Jewish and Christian extremists in various parts of the world. The danger to our society comes not from Muslims, but from extremists of all kinds. Meanwhile, many millions of our Islamic fellow citizens suffer because some would tar all the followers of Islam with the views and deeds of an extremist fringe. Rather than stereotype Muslim Americans, we need to embrace them. Like other minority group in America, the followers of Islam enrich our culture and strengthen our society by bringing their faith into the life of our communities and our nation. .

While Islam itself is not a threat to our society, the intolerance and disrespect that many Americans have shown to the followers of Islam is a real threat to America. Our society is founded on principles of religious tolerance and respect for diversity. The genius of America lies in the ability of people from all over the world to come together to build a vibrant, open and free society. The current mistrust towards Islam and attacks on its practitioners is a threat to those founding principles.

As regards the plans to build an Islamic center near Ground Zero, I am sensitive to the feelings to those who lost loved ones in the World Trade Center, and to the sensitivity of all Americans to that site. I feel that an Islamic institution dedicated to cross cultural understanding and religious cooperation would be a most fitting tribute to those who perished. We can show the world the best of America, and support the followers of moderate Islam, by permitting the building of an Islamic center on such sacred ground.

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