That’s what President Obama said about Arizona’s egregious immigration law, which promotes racial profiling by state law enforcement officials in the enforcement of immigration laws. Outrage at the law and its spirit spread across the nation. But so did copycat politics. In the months since its passage, twenty states have passed or proposed similar legislation. Seven of those states are among the top 10 population centers for Arab Americans—who may become targets of these laws.

That’s why AAI has become involved in combating this type of legislation. In the last two months, we’ve held strategy meetings with Arab American elected officials, including Arizona State Representative Matt Heinz and State Senator Paula Aboud. We’re mobilizing other ethnic communities around the implication of this trend, and we’re providing guidance and coordination to combat it. We’re getting the word out about other insidious proposals, including the newer Arizona law targeting “ethnic studies” classes which could have negative consequences for Middle East studies programs. And we’re educating our community members about the role their votes can play in stopping this trend. With elections less than six months away, this promises—rightly—to be a hot-button issue. AAI is going to make sure it’s an issue at the forefront of the national debate on security and civil liberties.

We’re keeping racial profiling on the table with federal agencies, too, making sure the topic was front-and-center in White House and Congressional briefings, and in meetings and correspondence with Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and Attorney General Eric Holder.

And our efforts have met with success, including amendment of the Transportation Safety Administration’s Screening Guideline targeting individuals (including US citizens) traveling to and from 14 countries—13 of which were Muslim or Middle Eastern countries. Our complaint, made directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security and in follow-up discussions with senior staff at DHS, played an important role in their decision to terminate this program.

We’re sure to see and hear more about profiling efforts as the election season goes into high gear, so stay tuned to aaiusa.org for the latest information and talking points. Remember to stay in touch with the folks vying for your support—let them know that this is a key issue for our community and for you.
AAI has hosted several meetings with federal officials in 2010. In January meetings with Attorney General Holder, and—with other Arab, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian organizations—Department of Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano, we discussed how continued racial, ethnic, and religious profiling is eroding the government’s relationship with our communities. We left these discussions with several commitments, including regular quarterly meetings with the Secretary; community representation on a task force of the Homeland Security Advisory Council; education and training for DHS leadership to promote understanding of our communities and their concerns; and an honest and full discussion of legitimate grievances from members of these communities about DHS policies.

AAI’s Capitol Hill briefing on racial profiling offered panelists the opportunity to highlight the unreliable nature of profiling based on national origin, and the very real danger of diverting attention and resources from legitimate intelligence work.

While the Administration’s Surface Transportation Security Priority Assessment is ongoing, AAI continues to monitor proposals and implementation of security measures to ensure that our community is not being subjected to illegal—and ineffectual—measures.

In April, AAI hosted more than 80 Arab American community leaders at a White House briefing, where top-level officials outlined—and fielded questions on—the Administration’s position on immigration reform, foreign policy, and security regulations. Juliette Kayyem, Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Programs at the US Department of Homeland Security, updated attendees on changes to aviation security measures and discussed reforming NSEERS and immigration enforcement. Deputy Assistant to the President Cecilia Munoz spoke about the policy framework for immigration legislation and encouraged all communities to participate in advancing comprehensive immigration reform. A discussion about foreign policy was led by Denis McDonough, Chief of Staff of the National Security Council, focusing on Administration efforts to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace and a responsible end to the Iraq war.

The US Census hardly seems like a hot-button topic, but in 2010 it became just that for the Arab American community. Because “Arab American” is not offered as a designation on the Census, some groups advocated that our community boycott the decennial survey. AAI, the nation’s only Census Information Center for Arab Americans, conducted a major outreach campaign to counter that movement.

Full Census participation by the Arab American community could lead to millions of dollars in increased funding—for Arab-speaking teachers and hospital workers, for cultural awareness programs and civic resources, and more.

Through bi-lingual Public Service Announcements, editorials and television and radio interviews, a comprehensive online Census toolkit, and even testimony before the House Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, AAIF helped educate our community and the nation at large about the importance of census participation among ethnic minorities. We’re proud to report that, even by the end of April, the national participation rate had surpassed the 2000 rate.

In the coming year, we will be analyzing data collected from the Census and the American Communities Survey (which does measure the Arab American population), and we will provide more and updated demographic information on our website.
The highlight of the Arab American social calendar, this year’s Gibran Gala was held on April 21, 2010. **US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice** opened the evening with congratulations from **President Obama** on AAI’s 25th Anniversary, saying “AAI has been a key voice in the larger American chorus: speaking up about pressing needs and concerns, championing increased Arab American participation in our nation’s political and civic sphere, and fighting ignorance and intolerance.”

Equally eloquent were this year’s awardees, including **Chicago Mayor Richard Daley**, for his promotion of the International Sister Cities program in the Arab world and for pioneering an Arabic language program in Chicago’s public schools; **Mr. Juma Al Majid**, businessman and philanthropist from the United Arab Emirates, for his establishment of the Juma Al Majid Center for Culture and Heritage; and **the Corporation for National and Community Service**, recognized for its broad array of programs, including VISTA and AmeriCorps. **Judge Rosemary Barkett**, of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, received the Najeeb Halaby Award for Public Service, and spoke of her family’s pride in its Arab heritage.

In one of the evening’s most touching moments, Dr. James Zogby presented Mr. and Mrs. **Abdulrahman Zeitoun** of New Orleans with an Award of Special Recognition. After spending the first five days after Hurricane Katrina delivering supplies and rescuing victims, Syrian-born Zeitoun was arrested as a suspected terrorist and held for weeks without contact with his family or attorney. Following his release and exoneration, he became the subject of Dave Eggars’ *New York Times* best seller *Zeitoun*, using proceeds from the book to start a foundation to help rebuild New Orleans and ensure the respect of human rights of all Americans.

This year’s Gibran Gala proved to be yet another extraordinary evening, and a chance for AAI to express our admiration of, and pride in, the accomplishments of the Arab American community. Thanks to the many friends who support our efforts, and continue to work tirelessly to promote the ideals and values of our country and our ethnic heritage.

**FIGHTING THE BLOCK-AID**

For decades, AAI has called on the US government to support the rights of Palestinian citizens, support the development of a viable economy, and provide humanitarian assistance to victims of recurring violence in Gaza and the West Bank. In February 2010, AAI—with 7 other organizations—sent a letter to President Obama in support of the McDermott-Ellison letter, calling for immediate action to address the grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza—a dire situation precipitated by Israel’s restricting the delivery of essential goods and materials to the region.

And then, just a few months later, the world’s attention again turned to the region. We mourned the loss of 9 humanitarian aid workers, killed in the Israeli attack on the flotilla bringing desperately-needed provisions to Palestinian families. We condemned the attack and called on the Obama Administration to demand an independent, impartial, international investigation of the events.

Even as we go to print, events are unfolding. Israel has “loosened” the blockade, and US officials have “welcomed the new policy toward Gaza.” But AAI is keeping the pressure on — because nothing short of terminating this illegal blockade can be acceptable.

AAI continues to monitor the situation, call for increased US aid to the people of Palestine, and support the mission of US Special Envoy George Mitchell to effect a fair, negotiated peace in the region. We will be paying close attention this summer, with the travel season already underway, to ensure the safe entry and passage of US citizens to and through the occupied territories.

**COMING THIS OCTOBER...**

*Arab Voices* will bring into stark relief the myths, assumptions, and biases that hold us back from understanding this important people. Pre-order your copy at Barnes & Noble today!