July 17, 2008

The Honorable John Conyers
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Conyers and Ranking Member Smith:

I write to you as President of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), and urge you to hold hearings on and pass the End Racial Profiling Act of 2007 (H.R. 4611). The AAA was founded in 1902 and is the primary professional society of anthropologists in the United States. With more than 11,000 members, it is the world’s largest professional organization of individuals interested in anthropology.

As recently reported by the Associated Press, rules being considered by the Justice Department may permit the FBI to institute new guidelines allowing the agency to investigate Americans based upon their race, ethnicity, religion, and/or travel patterns. Regardless of the accuracy of this report, profiling individuals based upon their physical traits or religious beliefs is a gross violation of civil rights. Physical profiling stems from and propagates the negative stereotypes and inequalities that pervade American society.

Present-day “racial” inequalities are the products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances. It is a basic tenet of anthropological knowledge that human beings have the capacity to learn any cultural behavior. The American experience with immigrants from hundreds of different language and cultural backgrounds who have acquired some version of American cultural traits and behavior is the clearest evidence of this fact. Moreover, people of all physical variations have learned different cultural behaviors and continue to do so, especially at a time when globalization is at its peak. The proposed FBI guidelines would condemn individuals to certain practices based solely upon their physical characteristics. This policy is misleading, discriminatory, and would result in the unlawful investigation of innocent civilians.

Despite the Administration, members of Congress, and the American public condemning racial profiling, stronger legislation is needed to effectively prohibit it within American society. We urge the members of this committee, as well as your peers in Congress, to bring a vote on H.R. 4611 and finally put an end to racial profiling.
We appreciate your prompt consideration in this matter. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact Damon Dozier, AAA Director of Public Affairs, at (703) 528-1902 or ddozier@aaanet.org

Sincerely,

Setha Low
President
American Anthropological Association