



Sections

The Washington Post

Acts of Faith

# Muhammad Ali on Donald Trump: 'Muslims have to stand up' to anti-Islamic speech

By [Niraj Chokshi](#) December 10, 2015



Donald Trump accepts an award from Muhammad Ali in Phoenix in 2007. (Jeff Chiu/AP)

**Donald Trump may call him a “friend,” but boxing champion**

**Muhammad Ali is clearly unhappy with the businessman’s politics.**

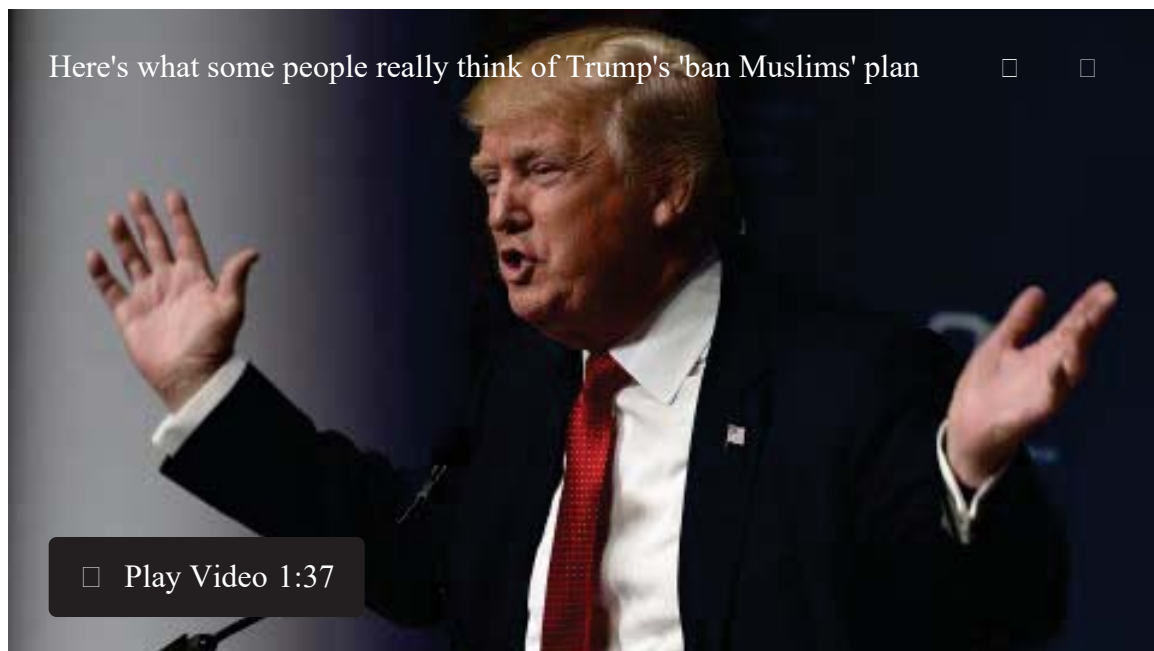
**Ali, one of America’s best-known Muslims, defended his religion as one of peace and criticized those who mischaracterize Islam for personal gain, in a statement aimed at the Republican presidential front-runner.**

“We as Muslims have to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda,” Ali said in a statement [first released to NBC News](#). “They have alienated many from learning about Islam. True Muslims know or should know that it goes against our religion to try and

force Islam on anybody.”

*[American Muslims raise more than \$170,000 for San Bernardino victims' families]*

While the statement doesn't name Trump, it's an obvious broadside against the billionaire: It is titled “Presidential Candidates Proposing to Ban Muslim Immigration to the United States,” a plan Trump shared on Monday.



Condemnation came quickly to Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump's call to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Here are some notable comments. (Gillian Brockell/The Washington Post)

In his Wednesday statement, Ali called on politicians to use their platforms to educate Americans on Islam.

“Speaking as someone who has never been accused of political correctness, I believe that our political leaders should use their position to bring understanding about the religion of Islam and clarify that these misguided murderers have perverted people’s views on what Islam really is,” he said.

[\[The world reacts to Trump's proposed ban on Muslims entering the U.S.\]](#)

Ali also repudiated the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif.

“I am a Muslim and there is nothing Islamic about killing innocent people in Paris, San Bernardino, or anywhere else in the world,” he said. “True Muslims know that the ruthless violence of so called Islamic Jihadists goes against the very tenets of our religion.”

Wednesday's statement wasn't the first time Ali felt he had to come to the defense of his religion.

By chance, he had scheduled an interview with Reader's Digest on Sept. 11, 2001, which he decided to go through with despite the terrorist attacks that morning.

“[F]or several hours the room was mostly quiet as the terrible events unfolded. He stared silently at the big-screen television while the World Trade Center buckled, and crumbled. And then Ali began to talk,” Howard Bingham, a friend of Ali's, [reported at the time](#).

From that interview:

**Bingham:** Tell us your reaction to the attacks this morning.

**Ali:** Killing like that can never be justified. It's unbelievable. I could never support hurting innocent men, women and children. Islam is a religion of peace. It does not promote terrorism or killing people.

**Bingham:** Muslims are supposed to be responsible for this. How does that make you feel?

**Ali:** People say a Muslim caused this destruction. I am angry that the world sees a

certain group of Islam followers who caused this destruction, but they are not real Muslims. They are racist fanatics who call themselves Muslims, permitting this murder of thousands.

**Bingham:** When you became a Muslim, the religion was perceived as anti-white. Has that changed?

**Ali:** The real Islam comes from Mecca. All people are God's people. The devil can be any color.

In the 9/11 interview, Ali said that "there's not half the trouble" being Muslim in America since he first accepted the religion decades ago.

And when Bingham asked how he felt about other religions, Ali replied with a metaphor: "Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams. They have different names, but all contain water. Religions have different names but all contain truth."

Trump and Ali had already been linked in the news this week.

After President Obama said in a Sunday night address to the nation that "Muslim-Americans are our friends and our neighbors, our co-workers, our sports heroes," Trump took to Twitter to ask: *Who?*

*Obama said in his speech that Muslims are our sports heroes. What sport is he talking about, and who? Is Obama profiling?*

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [December 7, 2015](#)

[As Matt Bonesteel noted](#): "We're a full-service shop here at The Washington Post, so here are some Muslim sports heroes, including a couple with whom Trump has been photographed."

First up was ... Muhammed Ali.

In fact, on Facebook earlier this year, Trump himself posted a vintage photo with "my friend Muhammad Ali."

Sign up

#TBT With my friend Muhammad Ali

Posted by [Donald J. Trump](#) on [Thursday, May 7, 2015](#)

People and groups Donald Trump has denounced



View Photos

Not one to back down easily from controversial statements, the Republican presidential candidate continues to add to the list of people he condemns.

### Related stories:

[Why Donald Trump's call for a Muslim ban may work for him, in two charts](#)