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AMERICAN HINDU COALITION

CONDEMNS HATE SPEECH AGAINST HINDUS BY CNN

Ashburn, VA – March 9, 2017 - CNN's broadcast of the series titled "Believer" hosted by Reza Aslan has received a deluge of criticism by American Hindus nationwide. Iranian-born Aslan is well known as an Islamist apologist who attacked comedian Bill Maher for stereotyping Muslims as extremists. Not surprisingly, Aslan, with dubious academic credentials in religious studies, has been criticized as anti-Christian for his sensational book: "Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth."

Shekhar Tiwari, Chairman, **American Hindu Coalition** stated: "We condemn the March 5, 2017 CNN broadcast, which promotes Aslan as 'a renowned author and religious scholar', proclaims that 'Hinduism -- the world's oldest living religion -- can seem complicated to outsiders', and portrays the *Aghoris*, a fringe community of mystics in India, as representative of the billion-plus practitioners of Hinduism in America and worldwide. The CNN broadcast defamed *Varanasi*, Hinduism's holiest city, by calling it the 'city of the dead' and the city's ancient steps by the river Ganges as a 'crematorium ground.'" Chairman Tiwari further added: "In light of the slew of recent hate crimes against Hindus, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (D - HI) best describes the disappointment and concern widely expressed by American Hindus:

"While good people across our country are working hard to increase mutual understanding and respect between people of different religions, I am very disturbed that CNN is using its power and influence to increase people's misunderstanding and fear of Hinduism. CNN on Sunday aired the first episode of a new series called "Believer" hosted by Reza Aslan. For this episode, Aslan apparently sought to find sensationalist and absurd ways to portray Hinduism. Aslan and CNN did not just throw a harsh light on a sect of wandering ascetics to create shocking visuals—as if touring a zoo—but repeated false stereotypes about caste, karma and reincarnation that Hindus have been combating tirelessly. CNN promotional materials and trailers that included a scene showing a group of Hindus under a caption, "CANNIBALS," perpetuated bizarre and ugly impressions of Hindus and their religion. CNN knows well that sensational, and even false reporting about religions only fosters ignorance that can lead to terrible consequences. Indeed, Hindus are still reeling after witnessing terrible hate crimes in the last few weeks alone. Our nation celebrates religious pluralism and diversity, and CNN must do more to foster greater respect for people of different religions. It is my sincere hope that CNN and Aslan will engage with the Hindu community moving forward to resolve the pain and outrage that the "Believer" episode on Hinduism has engendered in the community."