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Contact: Indra Lusero, Assistant Director, 303-902-9402, [indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu](mailto:indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu)

### **DROP IN ARABIC LANGUAGE SPEAKERS DISCHARGED FOR HOMOSEXUALITY LAST YEAR**

**New Data May Indicate Selective Enforcement**

SANTA BARBARA, CA, November 16, 2005 -- The military fired only one Arabic language speaker for homosexuality in fiscal year 2004 and no Farsi speakers, according to new data obtained from the Pentagon. By contrast, in the first ten years of the don't ask, don't tell policy up until 2003, the military fired 54 Arabic and 9 Farsi speakers for homosexuality.

The FY 2004 figures were obtained from the Pentagon by Congressman Marty Meehan (D-Mass.) and the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM), a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and reported in an Associated Press story today. The figures for the first ten years of "don't ask, don't tell" were reported in a recent Government Accountability Office study.

According to the new data, the military discharged a total of 32 foreign language speakers in fiscal year 2004, including 22 Spanish, 3 Korean and French, and one Chinese, German, Tagalog, and Arabic language speakers.

Nathaniel Frank, Senior Research Fellow at the CSSMM, believes that the new data may indicate that the Pentagon is enforcing the "don't ask, don't tell" policy selectively. "The military may be firing fewer Arabic experts for homosexuality," Frank said, "to avoid public embarrassment during a time of dire shortages of Arabic linguists."

Frank was referring to the public reaction that followed a November 2002 New Republic story reporting that the military had recently fired 7 Arabic language speakers for homosexuality. At the time, observers questioned the wisdom of discharging Arabic speakers given the widely reported shortage of Arabic language expertise in the government and the fact that potentially significant intercepted cables had not been translated before the September 11 attacks.

Another round of media coverage involved a second New Republic story, published in January 2005, which reported that the military had fired 20 Arabic and 6 Farsi language speakers for homosexuality



between 1998 and 2004. In 2004, the 9/11 Commission Report found that the government "lacked sufficient translators proficient in Arabic and other key languages, resulting in a significant backlog of untranslated intercepts."

Some experts, however, disagreed with Frank's interpretation. "Bob," a gay linguist who returned this fall from Iraq, told CSSMM researchers that, "because of the current needs of the Army in the war on terrorism, as well as retention problems, they're forced to keep more homosexual service members as opposed to discharging them." Statistics confirm that gay discharges always decline during wartime, and earlier this year researchers reported finding a regulation halting the discharge of gay soldiers in units that are about to be mobilized. In September, an official military spokesperson acknowledged that the Pentagon is sending openly gay service members into combat in Iraq. The Army, however, later retracted the comment.

According to Frank, "Regardless of whether the decline in Arabic language discharges reflects an effort to avoid embarrassing media coverage or to retain gay service members during the current war, the main question that Congress needs to address is whether the gay ban is helping the military or hurting it. The military has already fired 55 Arabic speakers for being gay since 1994," he said. "How many more will be fired?"

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Center for American Progress, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.