

Muslim citizens targets of threats, accusations

■ Officials say the public's ignorance of Islamic ideals and values may play a role in occurrences of harassment

By Lindsay Buchele
Oregon Daily Emerald

Muslims in Eugene say they are beginning to feel like the Jews in Nazi Germany.

Tammam Adi, director of the Islamic Cultural Center of Eugene, said Islamic women are leaving their scarves at home while men are shaving their beards and wearing hats, all to conceal their origin of descent and avoid the angry backlash of their fellow American citizens.

He said there is fear in the community that identification cards will be issued to Muslims, something he likens to the Star of David that Jews were forced to wear during the holocaust.

"People are not leaving their homes," Adi said.

For the most part, Adi said Eugene citizens are supporting Islamic and Muslim citizens, but that has-

n't stopped physical and verbal threats from happening.

Ibrahim Hamide, owner of Café Soriah in Eugene and an immigrant from Palestine, said his restaurant received a threat from someone who was going to "blow up my restaurant."

But, Hamide said, he has also received an incredible amount of support, including cards, flowers and verbal support from his patrons and other Eugene citizens.

"Eugene is a caring and wonderful community, but no community is idiot-free," Hamide said. "When angry, people say stupid things; we have all been idiots once or twice in our lives."

The Islamic Cultural Center was among the first to receive threatening calls, which ranged from death threats to accusations. Eugene Police Department spokeswoman Jan Power said one suspect has been apprehended for calls made to the center.

"It's important for harassment to be reported to the police," Power said. "Many community members have expressed some fear."

She also said that threats do not

have to be physical to be considered a criminal act.

"Verbal threats effect people mentally and can be just as harmful as physical violence," Power said.

Adi said that few victims are reporting the harassment. He is working with EPD and Eugene's Human Rights Commission on how to encourage reporting and how to educate the masses on Muslim practices.

"We don't want these crimes to continue, but if people aren't reporting them, the crimes won't stop," Adi said.

Greg Rikhoff, who heads the Human Rights Commission in Eugene, said his staff is ready to help with educating the public and helping Muslims protect themselves from threats made against them.

"A lot of people are fearful of coming forward," Rikhoff said. "They're hoping if they ignore the threats, things will return to normal."

A large part of the problem is the public's ignorance about the Muslim religion, Adi said. An important part of moving on is educating the public

on the ideals of Islam, he said.

Islam prohibits terrorism and attacks against women, children, the unarmed and acts against civilians. Adi said many Muslims deny their heritage to become "more American" and, in turn, leave a vast number of stereotypes still intact and the masses uneducated as to the true Muslim religion.

"[Islam] is not a known subculture," Adi said. "There is no information out there to educate the people."

And the majority of Muslims do not hold any hostility toward Americans, Hamide said, and to lump all the people of the religion together with the so-called radical Muslims is ignorant.

"It's stupid," Hamide said. "We do not associate all Americans with Timothy McVeigh. We are all unique, like snowflakes."

Adi said Osama bin Laden, who is currently the United States' prime suspect in the recent terrorist attacks, knows that Americans are ignorant about the Muslim religion and is using that to his advantage.

Greg Rikhoff, director of the Human Rights Commission, suggests the following phone numbers for reporting harassment incidents.

For immediate assistance: 911

To report to the police in a non-emergency situation: 682-5121

To speak to a Human Rights Commissioner: 682-5177

"What happened has to do with evil," Adi said. "Whoever did this is using religion as a cover, but there is no religious thinking there. Every religion respects human life."

Rikhoff said he hopes to aid Adi and others in helping Eugene residents recognize that Muslims are not a threat.

"I have tremendous faith in this community," he said. "The people here care for one another. But now they are grieving and are in pain. We need to show that the terrorists who claim to adhere to the Muslim faith do not represent the Muslim faith."

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bia, were walking down Coburg Road when a man yelled, "Kill the Arabs, kill all the Arabs," from his truck as he drove by.

Samman said she does not doubt that Osama bin Laden is behind the attacks. But she added that there are misconceptions about Islam's teachings, contributing to some of the hos-

tility toward Muslims on campus.

She said there is a sharp contrast between the teachings of the Quran and the "distorted" version of Muslim religion practiced by the Taliban, the Islamic militia that rules most of Afghanistan.

"According to Islam, suicide is a sin," she said. "The hijackers won't even go through judgment. They'll go straight to hell. Islam specifically means peace. How can you be

peaceful if you are killing people?"

Because some students are facing discrimination, director of the Eugene Islamic Cultural Center Tammam Adi said he plans to meet with University President Dave Frohnmayer in support of Muslim students.

Other Muslim students, however, have noticed few instances of hostility.

"I've gotten looks when I'm

walking on campus, but I don't know that there are more looks than usual," said Muslim student Alina Tureeva from Uzbekistan.

She said she suspects most people look at her out of curiosity. Others have said, "God bless you," as they've walked by her.

Pakistani sophomore Gibran Azamali said he has heard about some instances of bias, but he has not experienced any directed to-

ward him.

Shruti Shah, co-director of the International Student Association, said it is ignorant to direct anger and blame at a specific group.

"Just because a terrorist is from a certain country doesn't mean that everyone else from that country is the same way," she said.

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