
Local Muslims get support from other faiths

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Representatives of many faiths gathered today at the Islamic Center in Amherst to offer support to Muslims at a time when many speakers acknowledged the religion is under attack. Dr. Khalid J. Qazi, president of the Muslim Public Affairs Council of Western New York, led the ceremony for about 50 people.

Qazi recounted an emotional meeting he and other Muslim leaders held with former President George W. Bush in the White House soon after the attacks.

"When he hugged me and I told him I was from New York, honest to God, he cried and I cried," he said, adding that the encounter emphasized the sentiment of the time that "we are all in this together."

But he also said some have held all of Islam responsible.

"We as Muslims were actually held responsible for this barbaric act," he said. "For the actions of those 19 terrorists who truly had a visceral hatred for America, we were not prepared for that onslaught.

"We condemned the attacks in the strongest terms we could -- without reservation," he added.

But Qazi said despite the outpouring of support experienced by most Muslims, the religion has endured some of its most serious attacks in recent weeks and months.

Iman Yahya Omar, echoed Qazi's assertion that Americans should have no qualms about the loyalty of Muslims, who are also Americans.

"They are not Muslim," he said of the terrorists. "A Muslim cannot make harm for others.

We feel that what happened, happened to all of us."

Several Christian, Jewish and Buddhist leaders also stepped to the lectern to deliver messages of support and solidarity.

"We also gather to offer support to the Islamic community that has suffered unjustly over these last nine years," said the Rev. Stan Bratton, executive director of the Network of Religious Communities, who noted the freedom of speech granted by the Bill of Rights.

"While we may support this, we do not need to remain silent," he said. "We need to tell the truth, that Islam is not a religion of terrorists."

Other speakers included the Rev. Francis X. Mazur, representing the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, and Bishop J. Michael Garrison of the Episcopal Diocese of Western New York.

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