

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Vancouver area Muslims band together against rising bigotry

Critical Muslim Voices group hosts event Friday for Muslims to strategize and support one another — and fight Islamophobia after Quebec massacre.



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Vancouver lawyer Hasan Alam, a co-founder of the Lower Mainland B.C. group Critical Muslim Voices, appears in Vancouver in this 2015 portrait. He's also a community liaison for the B.C. Islamophobia Legal Assistance Hotline (604-434-3828)

By: David P. Ball Metro, Published on Thu Mar 09 2017

“It’s incredibly scary to think that, when I walk out the door every day — even though I don’t wear hijab and I am not identifiably Muslim — I could still be targeted,” explained Vancouver radio producer Abeer Yusuf.

She is one of the estimated 75,000 residents of Vancouver who identify as Muslim, according to the 2011 National Household Survey, a small fraction of Canada’s estimated one million Muslims.

Though the community’s B.C. numbers are small, many were nonetheless devastated by the Jan. 29 massacre in which a white supremacist opened fire on worshippers praying in a Quebec City mosque, killing six.

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But the massacre didn't come from out of the blue, Yusuf said. Islamophobia — prejudice against Muslims and people seen as Muslim — is on the rise in both Canada and the U.S., evidenced by the growing power of the so-called “alt-right” on both sides of the border, whether in the White House or the Conservative Party of Canada's leadership race.



CONTRIBUTED/ABEER YUSUF

Vancouver radio producer Abeer Yusuf is a member of Critical Muslim Voices, which is hosting a 'town hall' for Muslims in the region on Friday evening.

“To see it come to the forefront in such bizarre ways, and to see people wanting to hurt me because I believe in one belief system, engage in prayers five times a day, or read the Quran ... how does that mean I'm not worth giving dignity and rights to?” she asked.

Yusuf is a member of Critical Muslim Voices, and on Friday evening in Vancouver they're inviting Muslims to gather together for an event titled "Challenging Islamophobia: A Muslim Town Hall," at which Muslims can share in mutual support, and to strategize ways to confront bigotry as a community.

“Every Muslim person is affected by this,” she explained. “We're wondering, is there a way to seek community — a safe space to come together to ask, ‘What can we do together to work with other communities and give ourselves an opportunity to grieve and process.”

“We want to share with other Muslims, ‘You're not in this alone, we're all in this together.’”

According to fellow group member Hasan Alam — a Vancouver lawyer and one of Critical Muslim Voices' co-founders — many feel that Canada's media outlets and politicians moved on “way too quickly” to other subjects after the Quebec massacre.

“I was a little shocked by how soon the media stopped covering the event,” he said. “I feel if it were any other community, people would still be talking about the Quebec shootings.”

In fact, days after the massacre, Quebec’s Legislature debated banning religious symbols in public, often seen as a veiled reference to some Muslims’ head coverings. The following week, anti-Islam protesters blocked the entrance of a Toronto mosque, and leading Conservative candidates said federal anti-Islamophobia legislation was a violation of Canadians’ free speech. And this week saw Montreal universities targeted with bomb threats against Muslim students.

“We recognize the central role our allies will continue to play against Islamophobia — Muslims can’t take that on, on our own,” Alam said. “But for this first dialogue, we want people to feel safe and among people who have actually experienced Islamophobia, and you have to be Muslim to know what it feels like on a daily basis.”

But according to Critical Muslim Voices, the bigotry didn't begin with the "alt-right," Donald Trump's promised Muslim visitors ban, or even after the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks: "The more we perpetuate the idea that Islamophobia began on 9/11," a post to the event's Facebook argued, "the less we understand Islamophobia within the larger context of white supremacy and historical hostility against Muslims and Islam."

Friday’s town hall is open to anyone who identifies as a Muslim, and will include light refreshments followed by an expert panel and small group discussions. For more information on the event, email cmvoicesvan@gmail.com.

Alam is also a community liaison for the [B.C. Islamophobia Legal Assistance Hotline](#), which can be reached at 604-343-3828* or www.islamophobiahotline.ca.

**This article originally listed the B.C. Islamophobia Legal Assistance Hotline incorrectly. Metro apologizes for the error.*