

London attack brings focus to issues with Islamophobia throughout communities in Canada

By Rob Paul

Just over a month ago, a terrorist attack took place in London, ON. Four innocent people were killed and another injured when Nathaniel Veltman maliciously drove his pickup truck into the family?it was the largest mass killing in London's history.

The attack was born out of Islamophobia; the Muslim family was out for a walk on a Sunday and unprovoked, Veltman attacked them. The attack sent shockwaves through the country and Muslim communities.

Veltman has since been charged with four counts of terroristic murder and one count of terroristic attempted murder, but the damage has been done. Islamophobia is alive in Canada, a country many praise for its openness to others.

The attack has brought into focus issues with racism in the country, not just in London, but throughout. Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson says there's no place for this type of behaviour and he calls it what it is, a terrorist attack.

?The terrorist attack that horrifically took the lives of four innocent people in London was shocking and tragic,? said Thompson. ?I wrote to Mayor Holder to share the grief and sadness of the Caledon community and offer our support by lowering all flags at Town facilities. I think governments at every level need to continue to work and allocate resources that will help create safe and inclusive communities where this type of hate and terrorism has no place.?

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women Association's submitted two papers from students in the Muslim community to the Caledon Citizen. The papers focused on how devastating the London attacks were, the issues with Islamophobia in Canada, and the misunderstanding of the teachings of Islam.

?Islamophobia and these treacherous acts against Muslims have spread far out of control,? wrote Mariam Naveed. ?As can be seen from the deadly attack in London, Ontario. Islam condemns the act of violence and terrorism, believing that such acts will only bring about evil and immorality amongst society. Violence and terrorism are completely against the Islamic teachings. Thus, these acts should immediately come to a halt, only to save society and humankind. Through such devastating times, Muslims around the country stand as one to grieve this loss. They unite as one to implement what the world is at a loss of; love, kindness, and respect.?

?London terror attack ... where do I even begin,? Eashah Chaudry wrote. ?An absolutely obscene and devastating act that wiped three generations within seconds, leaving behind a nine-year-old boy. A boy who's left to fight for his life alone in the hospital. An act that suddenly changed the course of this boy's life. But not only did it affect this innocent family, it also gave the world a wake-up call for the issue that continues to linger in today's society, Islamophobia. It's sickening to think that this beautiful family was killed because of the hate a supremacist had towards a faith.

?To begin, I'd like to mention that I personally have also been going out for walks with my siblings regularly and am always and aware of my surroundings, because you can never know what the other individuals' intentions are. No one should have to be thinking about such things when just going for an ordinary walk. Yet, it's frightening to imagine that a 20-year-old terrorist killed four innocent Muslims who were enjoying their evening walk, like myself. Instead of focusing on becoming a better person and changing the world for better, the 20-year-old terrorist, Nathaniel Veltman, had other ideas, which were filled with spite. He decided to purge the family because of the false narratives and views he had about the Religion of Islam.?

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Women Association's Outreach Secretary, Eesha Abbasi, says the reason Muslims come to Canada is because of the respect and love the vast majority of people show to people of other races and religion. But she emphasizes that it doesn't mean Islamophobia isn't here.

"Canada is a country that gives freedom to all the communities, races, and religions," said Abbasi. "Canada has presented itself as a beacon of safety, but, as is everywhere, there are some bad apples that ruin it for the majority. At this difficult time, we as a Muslim community feel that it's very important as a nation we stay united and don't fall into the trap of becoming divided, which is what the terrorists and extremists desire and profit from.

"We do feel in terms of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred that it's a fact that it exists and we do feel that the government and authorities should take it seriously," she said. "We really appreciate that following the killing of an innocent family in London, the Canadians reacted with sympathy and strongly condemned anti-Muslim attacks, but we do feel there are certain measures that need to be taken."

There are Islamophobic tragedies of note that have brought attention to the issues in Canada in the past, but the problems go beyond that, says Abbasi. These are issues Muslims and other non-Caucasians deal with every day because of a hate that comes from a lack of understanding.

"There are main events happening," she said. "Like we saw in 2015 the mosque was set on fire and in 2017 the Quebec attack, and now this one. These are the main events being covered, but on a day-to-day basis if you just type it into Google, you'll see a list of racism attacks happening against Muslims, Asians, and immigrants. These are happening and these are on the verge of increasing day by day and year by year."

Educating people on Islam is something Abbasi says the Muslim community strives for, but it can't be a one-sided fight. She hopes to see the government do a better job educating Canadian citizens on Islam and the media to make more of an effort covering the positives that Muslims bring to the country.

"We do believe as a Muslim association that if the fear of Islam is on the rise then maybe as a Muslim community we must also recognize that we have failed to convey the true and peaceful teachings of Islam to the extent that is necessary," she said. "We consider it our duty to redouble our efforts to spread Islam's true teachings and to remove any misconceptions and fears that exist. But we do feel the media should also be encouraged to publicize the multitude of good being done by Muslim communities and the government should publicize and raise awareness of these issues. For example, we've done great fundraising throughout the year with food banks, blood banks, and Muslims for Remembrance Day where we raise money. The list goes on with the good work Muslims have done and we wish the media would publicize it more, so people are aware of the good things, not just the negative."

Abbasi thinks from the Muslim perspective it comes back to educating people on what Islam is because their misunderstanding of it leads to them associating it with terrorist attacks.

"As Muslims it's our responsibility as well to try and educate people and that can happen by portraying our beliefs in the best manner," she said. "Most people who fear Islam don't really know anything about Islam; it's just that they've heard terrorism attached to Islam. It's always Islam and terrorists and it's always Muslim and terrorists. Religion is always attached with extremism or terrorism, so they don't know the real Islam or real Muslim.

"There is no need to fear Islam it is not a religion of extremism or one that permits suicide attacks or indiscriminate violence," she said. "There is no need for Islamophobia because Islam's true teachings are of peace, tolerance and mutual respect. Islam's teachings are of upholding human values and protecting the honour, dignity and freedom of all people

"And that's what we Ahmadi Muslims under the guidance of our leader Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (May Allah strengthen His hand) try to portray and live by the motto, 'love for all hatred for none.'"