

LOCAL MUSLIMS FEAR ATTACKS AFTER TRADE CENTER, PENTAGON STRIKES

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Muslims in Charleston are afraid angry locals might take out their frustration over Tuesday's attacks on them.

"I can guarantee you, there will be bullets fired at our mosque in South Charleston," said Raheel Khan, a Charleston pediatrician and mosque leader.

Khan, an American citizen born in Pakistan, said the media is blaming Muslims for the attacks, just like during the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building.

In the hours following that bombing, television commentators presented "terrorism experts" who blamed Muslims or "Middle Eastern-looking" suspects for the bombing.

American-born right-wing extremist Timothy McVeigh later admitted to the bombing. That didn't stop local hooligans from breaking into the South Charleston mosque and vandalizing bathroom sinks and toilets.

In other anti-Muslim attacks following the Oklahoma City bombing, an arsonist set fire to a mosque, drive-by shootings occurred at Islamic centers and Muslim students were assaulted in about 200 incidents, the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations said.

"Muslims in America become a target for anger," Khan said. "Common Americans can't go after Osama bin Laden, so they come after us."

South Charleston Police are planning extra patrols for the area around the mosque, said Lt. V. K. West.

Ruby Abdulla of Charleston said the 5 million Muslims living in the United States will never be the same again.

Abdulla sells real estate and has lived with her husband in the Kanawha Valley more than 25 years. She said her co-workers and friends on the Kanawha Valley Interfaith Council understand that Islam doesn't condone terrorism. But not everyone does, she said.

"Everyone will look at you like you're involved," she said. "We should not take a few mad people and let them ruin the image of all the Muslim people."

A group representing four American Muslim groups issued a statement Tuesday afternoon denouncing the attacks.

"No political cause could ever be assisted by such immoral acts," said the statement from the American Muslim Political Coordination Council.

Khan agreed that politics could never justify terrorism, especially on such a massive scale. Still, Americans may want to take a look at their foreign policies, especially toward the Islamic world, he said.

Khan had not seen images of Palestinians celebrating in the streets and passing out candy after the attacks, but he said he was not surprised.

"Why is there so much anger against us worldwide?" Khan said. "We have to look at the plight of Palestinian people. We pour billions of dollars into Israel every year to bombard the Palestinian population."