

Australians band together to show support for Muslim community

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Two Muslim men who have experienced the rising tension in the community since the terrorism threat level was raised said it is affecting everyone, from their wives and children to the elderly.

Steve and Adam from south-west Sydney said they "can feel the tension in the air when you take your kids to the park" and there is also a visibly increased presence of the authorities which was making people feel uneasy.

In the past week, there have been a string of incidents involving Muslim women being verbally abused in the street, cars being vandalised and mosques and religious buildings sprayed with graffiti. Muslim community members have said they feel they are the ones being terrorised.

A 21-year-old man has been arrested and charged with being armed with intent to commit an indictable offence after allegedly entering the Al-Faisal school in Minto armed with a knife and asking if it was a "Muslim School".

Steve and Adam have said some of the community have responded by taking off the veil, trimming their beards or just staying at home and not going out.

"People on both sides are afraid," said Steve.

But men had a message for the rest of the community to "stay calm" and don't react.

They said the Muslim community had been through this before, and it would pass.

"We don't want something like the Cronulla riots to happen again.

"We just hope that it goes back to how it was before. We don't want anything to implode, we love this country, we just want to live in this great country," they said.

Their comments come as Australians have banded together to demonstrate their support for the Muslim community by organising solidarity marches, setting up social media accounts and donning the hijab in public.

Thousands of people have joined efforts to promote social harmony, including a social media campaign called Women in Solidarity with Hijabis (WISH).

The campaign, which was started by a non-Muslim woman named Ruth who put on a hijab and posted her photo online, took off last week and within three days the Facebook page had more than 7000 likes.

Muslim women commenting on the page were grateful for the gesture saying it was appreciated especially given that women wearing the hijab are bearing the brunt of public anti-Muslim sentiment.

In other initiatives a new Facebook page called Australian Non Muslims supporting Muslims, which began last week, already has almost 6000 members. The organisers said the "Islamophobia and discrimination encountered every day by Muslims living in Australia is unacceptable".

Sally Balkan, a Buddhist, is co-ordinating a solidarity march to take place in each state early next month where people from different faiths and backgrounds can march in support of the Muslim community.

"We refuse to hate each other," she told Fairfax Media.

Community Relations Commission chief executive Hakan Harman said people "need to stand by each other, speak out against hate and violence and report any incidents of harassment, intimidation or vilification".

Mr Harman said the actions of a few dangerous individuals should not prevent people from treating each other with respect and humanity.

His comments come as 250 mosques around the country delivered a united message through their Imams.

Organised by the Australian National Imams Council, the message to the congregations was that the "protection of human life is one of the five basic rights in Islam and as a Muslim we have a duty to protect humanity".

ANIC general manager Samir Bennegadi said the sermons denounced the so-called fatwa from overseas targeting Australia, saying it has no religious authority and reiterating that the horrors conducted overseas in the name of religion are crimes against humanity and sins against God.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/australians-band-together-to-show-support-for-muslim-community-20140926-10mjxu.html>