

Mosque arson attack denounced by show of solidarity

Rachael Murray, *The Chronicle*, 27 Jan 2015

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AN ISOLATED act of violence does not reflect the Toowoomba community as a whole. This was the recurring message of the speakers who addressed more than 100 guests at a mosque which was, incredibly, still standing.

If yesterday's public show of solidarity was any indication, the failed arson attempt on the weekend was also an attack on the values Toowoomba residents hold dear.

As he welcomed guests into the mosque, Islamic Society of Toowoomba secretary Mohammed Shahid said he was grateful for the sympathy and support of the Toowoomba community.



Amber Copland and Liam Holcombe join in a public show of support for Toowoomba's Muslim community. Photo: Kevin Farmer

"Many people expressed their sympathy and criticised the event, saying this was not acceptable."

Mr Shahid said Australia Day was an important celebration on his community's calendar and he hoped the acts of one individual would not cause a divide.

Griffith University Associate Professor Mohamad Abdalla made the trip from Brisbane to speak at the meeting and to show his support for the Toowoomba Muslim community.



Joining in a public show of support for Toowoomba's Muslim community are (front, from left) Peter de Voil, Cath Roche-Kelly and Josephine Frankland.

Photo: Kevin Farmer.

"Two weeks after 9/11, our mosque in Brisbane was burnt to the ground. All the books and educational material was burnt but we found a saying on one page remained," he said.

"It was both in English and Arabic and it stated - a strong person is not one who wrestles or defeats others, but one who controls himself in times of anger."

Professor Abdalla called for the community to move beyond negativity that manifested in ugly forms.

"I can say without hesitation I have travelled Australia back and forth and it is a beautiful place with beautiful people. There are bigots on both sides, but we must never allow bigotry to divide us.

"It is both ignorance and arrogance which lead to violent acts."

Islamic Society of Toowoomba president Professor Shahjahan Khan ended the meeting with a passionate speech calling for unity.

"The news of this attack has been covered by many national and international media. This will be very unhelpful, to say the least, in Toowoomba's bid to be declared as the City of Peace and Harmony by the UNESCO," he said.

"The attacker of the mosque has attacked the hard work of the residents of this city and its council."