

Muslim leaders call for calm after Sydney clashes

By Michael Vincent, staff, ABC News, 18 Sept 2012

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-09-18/muslim-community-in-damage-control-after-sydney-unrest/4266944>



Muslim Leaders hold a press conference today to outline their views on the recent violent protests in Sydney. Pictured speaking are Samier Dandan, President of the Lebanese Muslim Association and Silma Ihram, board member of the Australian Muslim Women's Association, with Muslim Community Leaders behind them.

Australia's Muslim community leaders have called for calm in the wake of Saturday's violent protests in the Sydney CBD.

An emergency meeting was held last night to discuss the fallout from the clashes, which left six police officers injured, and were in response to a US-made film which denigrates the Prophet Mohammed.

This morning the Lebanese Muslim Association's Samier Dandan told a Lakemba press conference that "the actions of a very small minority should not be used to tarnish the reputation of the whole community."

Speaking alongside other community leaders, he said: "We call upon all Muslim religious leaders to address the incident in their ceremonies this coming Friday, calling for calm in the legacy of our beloved Prophet Mohammed."

And the leaders called for any more rallies to be called off, saying they were "calling for people to stop protesting altogether."

"We pray that what occurred on Saturday does not repeat itself in the future," Mr Dandan added. "The Muslim community values the religious freedom that exists in Australia and supports all efforts to promote respectful coexistence."

Mr Dandan said there was no basis to claims that members of the Muslim community were seeking to radicalise children, after a young boy was seen at the protest carrying a placard which read "Behead all those who insult the prophet".

The boy's 25-year-old mother has turned herself into police, but officers say they are confident the child is at no risk and say no further action has been taken.

"The majority of the Australian Muslim community, particularly the mainstream, have not and will not educate our children in a way that Islam does not believe in," Mr Dandan said.

"This radical element does not exist in Australia and the Islamic organisations will not allow for such activity to take place, because at the end of the day the only community that will be tarnished by that exercise is the Australian Muslim community.

"It's not in our best interests and it's not in the interests of this country that has harboured so many refugees that come out of Muslim countries.

"It's in everyone's best interests to ensure that no such activities take place."

'Like a freak show'

But Saturday's clashes have already led to a significant backlash against the Muslim community.

The largest Islamic media site in Australia, muslimvillage.com, gets a million unique visitors a year and has a unique insight into the community and those who took part in the violent protests.



Photo: *Extremist: A group of protesters, one wearing a 'Sixth Pillar' shirt, during the Sydney demo (AAP: Marianna Massey)*

The site's director Ahmed Kilani has described the protests as "like a freak show" and says there has been a huge backlash.

"It's really ratcheted up the whole Islamaphobia and the fear of Muslims, it's probably done us back maybe, I don't know, five, six, seven, 10 years - who knows," he says.

Mr Kilani is used to receiving hate mail such as this:

EMAIL 1: "Good to see that the Muslims of Sydney have once again shown their true colours. Ignorant, violent animals, a disgrace to this country and all the Australian people. Why can't you all just disappear back to the Middle East where you can practise your violence and leave us in peace."

But he says this time the emails are coming from "rational" Australians who were disturbed by what they saw at the weekend.

EMAIL 2: "I write to express my disgust, to see kids with such placards promoting death as a way of revenge is horrific. Live in our land and obey our laws. I have never written to express my feelings to your group, but I am so incensed at what I saw on TV and the stupid remarks from some future terrorists."

EMAIL 3: "How can you honestly say that this Islamic faith is one of peace when we see our police, who are paid by our community to protect the community, see them abused physically and verbally by a bunch of Islamic goons."

"In the past when things happen you'll get material from the usual ratbag crowd, the ones that will use expletives, and just pretty much ignorant bigots, but a lot of them this time I've found have been from people that are actually quite rational," he said.

"[But] when people that are rational are actually saying, 'Look, I'm really frightened and I don't know what to think anymore,' it shows that we have a lot of work to do as a community," he said.

"Not just as Muslims, but the greater Australian society can maybe create a lot more harmony and understanding between people.

"Because we all live here and we're all together, we need to find a solution to these things, these issues."

Mr Kilani says he is not surprised by reports those who took part in last weekend's violence have had links to criminals or terrorist investigations.

"I'll wait until all the arrests are made and the convictions, if they are going to go ahead, and it wouldn't surprise me at all if a vast majority of those arrested do have current criminal backgrounds," he said.