

Islam not about terrorism, expert says

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Terrorism is contrary to the Islam and should be condemned, according to a featured speaker at a Muslim conference in Regina Saturday.

Shaikh Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, said he was speechless when he first learned of the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

Acts of that nature "must be condemned" no matter what the religion of the people who commit them, Kutty said at a conference sponsored by the Muslims for Peace & Justice organization.

Speaking to about 100 people at the University of Regina, Kutty said the teaching of Islam is misunderstood or twisted by some people who take words written in the Koran out of context. "Peace is the norm in Islam," Kutty said.

War is only permitted in exceptional circumstances, as the last resort in self-defence, he said.

The teachings of Islam also make it clear that women, children, civilians and other non-combatants should be excluded from harm if there is a war, Kutty said.

In an interview after his speech, Kutty said he does not believe international issues, including those in the Middle East, can be solved by violence.

Negotiation and reconciliation provide the only solution to those problems, Kutty said.

"If we are true to God, we have to resolve issues peacefully rather than through violence."

While conceding that some evil acts have been made by people who have misunderstood the Islamic faith, Kutty said it is unfair that all Muslims get a bad reputation as a result. Many other atrocities have been committed by Christians and members of other faiths who have misunderstood the teaching of their own church, Kutty said.

He cited the atrocities committed by the crusaders many centuries ago, as one example of a misunderstanding and misuse of the teachings of the Christian faith.

Citing a more recent example of misuse of religious faith, Kutty mentioned a man in the U.S. who -- based on his Christian beliefs and opposition to abortion -- murdered a doctor who performed abortions.

Kutty also gave his own interpretation of the word "jihad" which is often understood as a kind of a holy war or as an uprising against unjust government authorities. But Kutty said he sees jihad as an internal struggle, that all Muslim must have within themselves to live their lives in accordance with the true principles of Islam.

"The real enemy is within," he said.