

Extremism threat to youth: Sask. Muslim group

By Janani Gopal of The StarPhoenix
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The Islamic community must continue to be vigilant about the threat of extremist attitudes taking hold of young Muslims, said a spokesperson for a Saskatchewan-based Muslim advocacy organization.

In a telephone interview from Regina, Kashif Ahmed said the organization, Muslims for Peace and Justice, was pleased to hear that a possible terrorist plot was pre-empted with the arrest of 17 suspects in Toronto.

The Muslim community also played a role in notifying police about the suspicious behaviour of two of the accused men, he said. Muslims who heard the men express militant views at mosques became concerned and shared their concerns with police, said Ahmed.

"And that's a positive step," he said. "That's something which Canadian Muslims are doing all across the board when they come across such information."

In addition to partnering with police to root out extremists in the community, Ahmed said local mosques hold seminars to make sure youth are getting the right information about Islam and to ensure young people have not been recruited by terrorists.

"Young men (have) very impressionable minds," said Ahmed. "If they don't have the proper understanding . . . about Islam and what it stands for, they could be easily brainwashed and radicalized by those individuals."

Mosques need to be aware that extremists coming to Canada from foreign countries could exploit young Muslims' frustrations about emotional issues, such as what's happening in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Ahmed.

"It's in the Muslim community's best interest to stop extremism at its root and turn in radicals who might try to influence our youth," he said.

Ahmed said his community has become worried about people lashing out against Muslims in retaliation for the alleged terror plot. In Toronto, less than a day after police broke up the alleged terror cell, vandals broke the windows of a large mosque in the city.

"I don't think we'll see that widespread backlash, but it is a fear," he said. To stop the possible backlash, Ahmed said Muslims have to continue to work with police and educate the public about Islam.

Dr. Ahmed Shoker, president of the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan, said Muslim communities need to understand what was on the suspects' minds to find out how to prevent the "disease" of radicalism from infecting more youth. "We have a responsibility and we have a duty and we definitely will do it," he said.