

# Attacks set back ethnic relations: Muslims

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

If Zaheer Abbas Karim could, he would choose to live in the world as it was before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Before, he said, people seemed less hesitant when dealing with Muslims.

Women wearing a hijab, or veil, and men with a bushy beard travelled to the U.S. without facing security checks so extensive many feel they can border on harassment.

And Muslims in York Region had built up a rapport with their non-Muslim neighbours, recalled Mr. Karim, a university student from Richmond Hill.

"They weren't ready to put the labels on the way they are now."

Yet, in the aftermath of the terror, several Muslim institutions in the area took a fresh opportunity to express and explain what true Islam is — a religion of peace.

And essentially, the violent backlash which many Muslims had feared on Sept. 11 did not happen here.

Soon after the attacks, students at the Islamic Shia Study Centre in Vaughan were warned they could "be potentially exposed to acts of misdirected harshness towards Muslims" in a letter that urged them to "be the shining example that a Muslim should be" and to not return that "harshness".

In the following months, however, children at the school and families at the Jaffari Islamic Centre, a Shia mosque in Thornhill, have not reported any negative experiences linked to Sept. 11, said Shabbir Mohamed, a



STAFF FILE PHOTO/MIKE ADLER

Worshippers pray during an inter-faith service last year after the Sept. 11 attacks at the Jaffari Islamic Centre in Thornhill. Before the Al Qaeda terrorists launched their deadly U.S. strikes, people in York Region were less hesitant in dealing with Muslims, said one resident.

spokesperson.

He pointed out many York Region Muslims are third-generation Canadians and most were born and educated here. "This is their home. They don't know any other home."

Signs of strife were also absent between Vaughan's Ahmadiyya Muslim community, concentrated around the Bai'tul-Islam Mosque in Maple, and its non-Muslim neighbours, said Dr. Ijaz Qamar,

secretary for external relations for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Canada.

"They haven't raised any finger or caused any problems that I know," he said.

Community leaders say an increased police presence around mosques, synagogues and other places of worship may have helped ward off potential threats.

York Regional Police statistics show, however, that reports of hate

crimes did rise dramatically after Al Qaeda terrorists commandeered jetliners into the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Twenty-four hate crime incidents were reported in September alone, compared to a previous monthly average of four.

In October, the number dropped to 11 and now it averages six per month, said Det.-Const. Brian Cowie, YRP hate crimes offi-

cer. Det.-Const. Cowie believes ethnic conflict in the region is more apparent than it was a year ago.

About 20 per cent of reported incidents are consistently targeted against the Jewish community, he said.

It is difficult to identify the number in which Muslims are victims, since records describe them as "Middle Eastern", Det.-Const. Cowie said.

"But we've had a few occurrences where (Muslims) have been involved, in mutual exchanges yelling, arguments, disputes where police had to attend, which were totally based on religious differences."

Kamil Sadiq, chief co-ordinator for the Canadian Federation of Intercultural Friendship, believes some Muslims were targeted for insults, including women in Muslim dress who were accosted in an area shopping mall and told, "Go back to your country and you're all terrorists," he said.

Formed last year before the terrorist attacks, the CFIF — a Markham-based organization promoting cross-cultural understanding — met police officials and talked with Muslims in the region in an effort to reassure them about security.

With a membership from many religious and ethnic groups, it continues its work, Mr. Sadiq said. "If we get to know people culturally, we make good friends."

— with files from Linda Johnson

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## 'How much has terrorism touched our daily lives?'

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world in which our children are growing up.

At the same time, however, how much have the attacks touched our daily lives?

I remember the morning of the attacks, how stunned co-workers were stilled as reports of the terror flooded into the office. How it became evident that what at first appeared to be a horrible accident was a planned nightmare.

I remember driving that morning to cover the funeral of a popular Newmarket teacher killed by her troubled schizophrenic son days before. As I scanned the skies for the remote possibility of terrorist attack here, I thought how one family's

despair had been eclipsed by the unspeakable devastation south of the border.

I remember the night after the attack, talking about the events with neighbours. I recall one little boy's terror when a car backfired down the street and he just kept screaming over and over "They're coming to kill us" until we finally managed to divert his attention back to more child-like pursuits.

But as the hours after the attacks turned into days and then weeks and months, we all went back to our lives while the soundtrack of Sept. 11 played relentlessly in the background.

We went to work, sent our kids to school, paid our bills, got together with family and friends, bickered about those who upset us, planned

our vacations, ate our meals and slept at night.

Then we got up in the morning and started the whole routine again.

Experts say it's not that people are indifferent to the attacks. Far from it, the impact will reverberate for years to come.

But as the shock wore off, Sept. 11 joined the long list of fears that bombard us these days.

West Nile virus, E. coli, job insecurity, road rage, child molesters, crime, global conflict — it seems every month there is something new to worry about, or to add to the cumulative assault on our psyches.

Dr. Harold Grossman, clinical director of mental health at York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill, said the terrorist attacks have left us

with a psychological dichotomy a year later.

On one hand, some people are still suffering from post-traumatic stress, prey to the anxiety and hyper-vigilance that makes them feel as if they have little control over events in their lives.

That stress is compounded when confronted with triggers, such as getting on a plane or hearing about a new security threat to our borders.

"I don't think there's any of us that could get on a plane and not think about what happened last year and check out other passengers," Dr. Grossman said.

"And then there are others who avoid flying altogether, although they would have had little trouble getting on a plane before last Sept. 11."

On the other hand, he said people's ability to go on with their daily lives after the initial days and weeks after the attacks speaks to the human race's amazing ability to adapt to even traumatic change.

"As a species, we can adapt. We are adaptable, even though our lives are radically different. It's part of our magic to adapt," Dr. Grossman said.

He also questions the long-term impact of Sept. 11 on our lives.

"Have we changed? It has changed us, no question. But at the same time, it hasn't really affected the structure of our daily lives, has it?" he said.

"The anniversary (of the attacks) poses some interesting questions. I'm not sure we have the answers to them."

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