

## Orange County's Muslims denounce Paris attacks, fear backlash at home

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Muslim leaders in Southern California are condemning last week's terrorist attacks in Paris and advising mosques and Islamic schools to beef up security and stay on alert for potential backlash.

Many added Monday that the terrorists who killed 129 people Friday night in Paris and injured more than 300 others – an attack the Islamic State group says it sponsored – do not represent the religion or the majority of its followers.

"We are shocked and sorrowful on one side and disturbed to the point of anger that Islam was hijacked by some moronic, corrupted minds," said Shakeel Syed, executive director of the Islamic Shura Council of

Southern California, which represents 112 mosques in Orange and Los Angeles counties and the Inland Empire.

On Friday, the Shura Council warned its members that terrorist acts by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, might lead to vandalism and threats in Southern California.

There were no local anti-Muslim incidents reported over the weekend.

The Shura Council asked its members to exercise more caution, establish a security team with a protocol for emergency communications, have on hand "visible security personnel," walk women and children from temples to parking lots, and call police if there are any disturbances.

"We don't want to create paranoia in the community so that people are afraid to worship and seek solace in the sanctuary," Syed said. "We do caution and alert mosque leadership to be mindful of the safety and security of the assets and their community members."

Some larger mosques in the region already have security, especially during well-attended services and events. Smaller venues may now hire guards or tap their members to be more vigilant, Syed said.

About 500,000 Muslims live in Orange and Los Angeles counties and the Inland Empire, Syed said.

On Monday, France identified a suspected plotter of Friday's attacks, naming a Belgian national with ties to Syria.

But even before that, the Paris attacks were provoking a less welcome response to refugees fleeing violence and terrorism in Syria.

Several countries have discussed closing their borders. And by Monday, 23 U.S. governors had issued statements indicating they don't want Syrian refugees in their states, citing the possibility that militants might be among the refugees. (Gov. Jerry Brown said California will remain open to Syrian refugees, but urged strong background checks.)

Meanwhile, Republican presidential candidates voiced opposition to resettling the Syrian refugees in the United States. One called it "lunacy."

Another suggested focusing on Syrian Christians. And former Arkansas governor and presidential candidate Mike Huckabee told Fox TV: "It's time to wake up and smell the falafel."

Suhail Mulla, an imam and the deputy director of Access California Services, an Anaheim-based organization that provides services to Arab and Muslim American communities and all refugees, said he is disheartened by such talk.

"We've been experiencing backlash since 9/11, but it always intensifies when different terrorist acts happen in different places," Mulla said. "But what I'm more concerned with this, in this go-around, is the policy backlash."

Others pointed out that Muslims are victims of ISIS and of terrorism in general.

"If you look at the facts, ISIS has killed many more Muslims in Syria, Beirut (and elsewhere) than anyone else," said Farrah Khan, executive director of the Newport Mesa Irvine Interfaith Council.

Security was increased Saturday night at the annual banquet for the Council on American-Islamic Relations at the Anaheim Hilton, attended by some 1,800 members and guests, said Hussam Ayloush, executive director for the group's Greater Los Angeles chapter in Anaheim.

With a contingency of religious leaders from different denominations standing behind him, Muzammil H. Siddiqi, the religious leader of the Islamic Society of Orange County in Garden Grove, read a prayer for peace.

It condemned the violence in Paris, as well as violence throughout Iraq and Syria, in Ankara and in Beirut, where an ISIS attack last week left more than 40 people dead and more than 200 wounded.

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