



Peaceful Muslims: We'll do our part

By MARIE SZANISZLO

NEWS ANALYSIS

Moments after the interfaith service eulogizing the dozens of victims of the London bombings had ended, the woman confronted the imam in the vestibule of Trinity Church in Copley Square.

Talal Eid, the religious director of the Islamic Center of New England, listened politely as she demanded to know what he was doing to help stop Islamic extremism, before a church member stepped in and ushered the woman out.

"I think this is the government's job to stop terrorism, not my job," Eid said later. "My job is to cooperate if I see something suspicious."

If his tone is somewhat defensive, that is, one could argue, understandable. As terrorists around the globe continue their carnage in the name of Islam, pressure is mounting on Muslims to not only condemn the attacks, as Eid and others have done repeatedly, but to also fight for the soul of a religion that increasingly is being hijacked by extremists.

"The war on terror has to be more than a military fight," said Kamal Nawash, president of the Free Muslims Coalition in Washington, D.C. "At its heart, Muslim terrorism is an ideological war. And ultimately, only Muslims can stop it."

In May, the coalition sponsored an anti-terror-



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OUTSPOKEN: Imam Talal Eid, religious director of the Islamic Center of New England, condemns extremists' attacks but says it is the government's job to stop terrorism.

ism rally that attracted thousands of Muslims to the capital. And it is developing a curriculum for Islamic schools, using the Koran to discredit what Nawash calls the "sick ideology" terrorists use to justify mass murder. One group can only do so much, he concedes. And he does not mince words in his assessment of the overall Muslim response to terrorism.

"The Muslim leadership has not done its fair share, and what they have done has been useless," he said. "What good is it to take out ads in newspapers non-Muslims read and make speeches non-Muslims hear? It's a public-relations ploy to prevent backlash."

Nawash attributes the failure of some Muslim leaders to take more aggressive action to a com-

bination of incompetence and a preoccupation with the victimization of Muslims, from the time of the prophet Mohammad to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"The truth is many Muslims share this ideology; they just think they're going about it the wrong way," he said.

One of the ironies those people overlook, Nawash said, is that the majority of the victims of Islamic terrorism are Muslims. But logistically, getting any message out in the Muslim community can be difficult because it lacks the structure of hierarchical religions such as Catholicism, said Rabia Harris, coordinator of the Muslim Peace Fellowship in Nyack, N.Y.

"There have been endless numbers of condemnations" of the attacks, Harris said. "But Islam is probably

the most disorganized of the major religions. It's not uncommon for one congregation to have virtually no contact with another only a few miles away. So coordinating anything on a local level, much less a national or global one, is a challenge."

The Islamic Society of North America is pushing for more coordination and openness among mosques. Although that would not end extremism, it would be a beginning, Eid said, because one of terrorism's prerequisites is secrecy, and the veil cannot be lifted by strangers.

"People who say there are legitimate reasons (for terror) can say that from now until the day they die, and they will still be wrong," he said. "They are doing it in the name of my religion. They have no right."