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## PR campaign urged to counter Islamophobia

By Javid Hassan, Arab News Staff

RIYADH, 1 October — The Gulf states should mobilize their resources to project the true message of Islam in the West and repair the damage done to their image following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

Omar Ahmad, chairman, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), said an important element of the Kingdom and other Gulf states' strategy should be the mounting of an aggressive public relations campaign in the US to counter the anti-Islamic and anti-Arab propaganda by Zionists.

"If Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon could spend \$3 million on trying to change his own image from that of a terrorist, there is no reason why the Muslim states should lag behind, especially when they are being unfairly targeted for the crimes committed by some individuals," Ahmad told Arab News.

The CAIR chairman is on a visit to Riyadh and Jeddah to meet Islamic scholars and senior government officials to brief them on the course of events in the US after the Sept. 11 attacks.

He said the Zionists were quick to exploit the tragedy by portraying Arabs as terrorists. As a result of their campaign, which was aided and abetted by the media, there were over 650 cases of anti-Muslim incidents, including attacks on women, Islamic beliefs and values, mosques, homes and schools. Four people have been killed.

"It was the biggest backlash against Islam and Muslims in recent history," he observed.

He said that in the wake of these attacks there was a growing interest among Americans in Islam. Attendance in mosques has surged, while there is an upswing in the sale of copies of the Holy Qur'an and other Islamic publications. People are keen to find out all about the concept of Jihad and how it could inspire a Muslim to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his religion.

Ahmad said a positive aspect of the situation was that US President George W. Bush had made himself accessible to the Arab Americans — something that was difficult in the past. Arab Americans have also strengthened their ties with Congressmen. These developments may have helped to contain the powerful Zionist lobby's anti-Arab and anti-Islam drive.

CAIR, he said, is also moving on other fronts. They have placed 30 articles in the US media explaining the Muslim community's point of view.

A hotline has been set up for the benefit of the community, while schools are being approached for the distribution of Islamic literature.



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Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



Arab News 30th Anniversary Supplement



Life of Prophet Muhammad



