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Arrests 'frustrate' area Muslims

Leaders unfamiliar with couple but fear association by public

By CLAUDIA BOYD-BARRETT BLADE STAFF WRITER

Local Muslim leaders reacted cautiously Thursday to news of yet another terrorism-related case in the Toledo area.

The Muslim representatives said they had not heard about the arrests of Hor and Amera AKI and did not know the couple.

Imam Farooq Abo-Elzahab, of the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, said the name "Hor" is very unusual and he had not come across it before. He denounced the Akls' alleged attempts to funnel money to a terrorist group.

"This kind of illegal activity should be condemned, and it is condemned by all Muslims," he said.

Imam Farooq said he feared the arrests would reflect negatively on the area's Muslim community, which has had to deal with bad publicity from two other terrorism-related cases in Toledo in the past few years.

"I do not know what to say. It's very frustrating to hear about these kinds of things," Imam Farooq said. "Muslims are good people, and this kind of thing is showing only the ugly side."

Dr. S. Zaheer Hasan, spokesman for the United Muslim Association of Toledo, said he couldn't yet comment on the case because he didn't have enough facts.

"I really don't know what's going on," Dr. Hasan said.

Ibrahim Hooper, national spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which has several offices in Ohio but not in Toledo, said it was too soon to jump to conclusions about yesterday's arrests. However, he said the fact that an FBI informant was involved in building a case against the Akls raises questions about the strength of the charges.

"Whenever you have a case where the government is initiating the action, it raises red flags in terms of possible concerns about who really was the initiator of the alleged violation," Mr. Hooper said. "We will have to wait and see how the case develops and we'll obviously monitor it to make sure everybody's due process rights are maintained."

Mr. Hooper cited other terrorism cases in which he believes FBI informants helped encourage marginal individuals to commit illegal acts.

Yesterday's arrests were just the latest to put Toledo in the terrorism spotlight. In 2006, federal authorities arrested three Toledo men - Mohammad Amawi, Marwan El-Hindi, and Wassim Mazloum - and charged them with plotting to build bombs and help assist insurgent attacks in Iraq. The men, two Jordanians and one Lebanese, were all living legally in the Toledo area and one is a naturalized American citizen.

The men were sentenced last October to between 8 and 20 years in prison, pending an appeal. A paid FBI informant who infiltrated the group provided crucial recordings and video evidence for the prosecution.

Also in 2006, the U.S. Treasury Department shuttered a West Toledo charity, KindHearts for Charitable Humanitarian Development Inc., and

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froze its assets amid allegations that it was funneling money to terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

In 2009, a judge ruled that the government violated the group's constitutional rights, saying its assets were seized illegally and authorities had prevented it from adequately defending itself against allegations of ties to terrorism.

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