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Qu'ran 3:97
Calligraphy by Mohamed Zakariya

Muslim Students Harassed in Minnesota Public Schools

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Muslim Students Harassed in Minnesota Public Schools

The Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-MN) today called on the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to investigate and address reports of growing racial and religious tensions in Minnesota public schools.

CAIR-MN's request for DOE intervention came following a series of anti-Muslim incidents reported to the civil rights organization by students across the state. Muslim students have allegedly been called "towel head" and other religious and racial slurs and faced harassment for their religious beliefs by other students and teachers. Some alleged incidents include:

Two students approached a group of Muslim high school girls and asked them if they would like some pork bacon. When the girls informed them that their religion prohibited pork, the students made disparaging remarks about their religion. A week later, the two students brought pork bacon to school and shoved it in the faces of Muslim students and chased after them when they tried to get away.

Students wrote racist essays for their English class and posted them on a class blog to harass Muslim students.

A bus driver left Muslim students waiting at a bus stop on several occasions, driving past them when she saw them and telling them: "Catch me if you can."

A World History teacher made disparaging comments about Islam and Muslims in class.

A teacher, on several occasions, handed students a can of air freshener and instructed them to spray the room when Muslim students walked into class.

SEE: Somali Population, Cultural Tension Rising in St. Cloud
<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/03/15/st-cloud-tensions>
SEE ALSO: Tensions Mount at OHS <http://www.owatonna.com/news.php?viewStory=111955>

Yesterday, members of Minnesota's Islamic community gathered at the State Capitol to discuss the civil and religious rights of Muslim students with legislators.

Students reported to CAIR-MN that school administrators have failed to effectively respond to the incidents and the harassing treatment often becomes worse after they report it. Students also reported that those who are targeted the most are Somali students with limited English proficiency because the perpetrators think that these students will be unable to communicate the incidents to administrators.

"It is clear that racial and religious tensions in the community have manifested in the schools and need to be addressed immediately," said CAIR-MN Assistant Director of Civil Rights Zahra Aljabri. "Students of all faiths and backgrounds in Minnesota must have a learning environment free of racism and intolerance."

Aljabri said the hostile school environment is affecting students academically and emotionally. She noted that U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently pledged that his department is going to take a more active role in enforcing civil rights for students nationwide.

CAIR-MN is asking the U.S. Department of Education to investigate these incidents; aggressively implement racial and religious harassment policies and procedures; institute a zero-tolerance discrimination policy; discipline students, faculty and administrators who engage in bias-motivated behaviors; and provide peer mediation and diversity trainings to faculty and staff to create a safe community for learning and growing in Minnesota.

CAIR offers a booklet, called "[An Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices](#)," designed to help school officials provide a positive learning environment for students of all faiths.

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

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