

Canadian imams to speak out against "honor killing"

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Note strong language in 8th paragraph

By Randall Palmer

OTTAWA (Reuters) - Canadian imams plan to condemn the "misguided notion" of so-called honor killings in their Friday sermons this week, responding to the high-profile trial of a father accused of murdering his three teenage daughters, allegedly because they shamed his Afghan family.

The two dozen imams, backed by 60 Canadian Muslim groups, will plead for action to fight domestic violence, perhaps quoting comments from the prophet Mohammad that "the best amongst you is he who treats women the best."

"We felt very strongly that we had a responsibility to make it very, very clear that honor killings -- so-called honor killings; we don't want to consider them anything honorable -- have absolutely nothing to do with Islam," said Sikander Hashmi, an imam in the Ontario city of Kingston where the trial is taking place.

Canadian-born Hashmi said he addressed the issue in a sermon to the 150 to 200 people in his mosque last month and plans to do so again this Friday.

The issue hit the headlines as an Afghan immigrant businessman, his wife and his son face trial for the 2009 drowning deaths of the three teenagers, and of a fourth woman, said by the prosecution to have been the businessman's first wife. The young women allegedly shamed the clan with dating and other practices.

The three defendants deny the charges, and say it was all an unfortunate accident that they had nothing to do with.

But in the murder trial the prosecution played a secretly recorded tape of remarks the father, Mohammad Shafia, made to his son Hamed in the weeks after the deaths: "Even if they hoist me up onto a gallows, nothing is more dear to me than my honor."

Another conversation has him saying of his three dead daughters: "God curse on them for generations. May the devil shit on their graves."

The prosecution said Shafia had displayed unhappiness with how his girls had been dressing and who they had been seeing. One of them had a Spanish-speaking Christian boyfriend, who testified at the trial.

The U.N. Population Fund estimates that "honor killings" claim the lives of 5,000 people a year. Many but not all of the deaths occur in Islamic contexts.

The signatories to the Canadian call for action declared their moral opposition to using the word "honor" to describe such killings and decried

"abhorrent and yet persistent pre-Islamic practices rooted in the misguided notion of restoring family honor."

"Islam is very strongly against these types of acts, including domestic violence," Hashmi told Reuters.

But Muslim maverick Tarek Fatah, a frequent critic of Islamic organizations, said it was dishonest to deny the Islamic roots of honor killing.

He said he did not endorse the November 15 statement because it did not address gender inequality, and said an unmarried woman with a boyfriend is deemed in Islam to have committed adultery and dishonored her father.

"Unless they (the imams) come out distancing themselves from the punishment of adultery by death, no progress can be made," he said.

(Editing by Janet Guttman)

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