

Leaders send a loud message: Domestic violence is un-Islamic

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Islam does not condone domestic violence. The Qur'an does not sanction the idea of honour killings.

This is the loud and clear message from almost 60 prominent Muslim organizations, dozens of community leaders and activists from all over Canada, and a sermon that will be delivered from mosque pulpits next Friday even as the high-profile Shafia trial continues in Kingston.

"This is a call to action within the Muslim community," said Samira Kanji, CEO of Noor Cultural Centre in Toronto. "We want to make sure that no one can cite Islam as validation over horrific crimes or rights over anyone else."

It's the first time since the London bombings in July 2005 that this many community leaders and organizations have come together in Canada to issue a statement and tackle a problem head-on.

The Shafia trial was one reason for "this call to action within the Muslim community," said Kanji. "But it was a conglomeration of events."

Domestic violence is a huge problem everywhere and the Muslim community has its share, she said. "But it's important to tell people that Islam doesn't sanction it."

The Shafia trial has captured headlines nationwide.

The bodies of sisters Zainab, 19; Sahar, 17; and 13-year-old Geeti Shafia were discovered with their polygamist father's first wife, Rona Amir Mohammad, 50, in a car in the Rideau Canal in June 2009.

The girls' parents, Mohammad Shafia, 58, and Tooba Mohammad Yahya, 41, and their son Hamed Mohammad Shafia, 20, face first-degree murder charges.

In recent days, sordid details have unfolded in the case, including a wiretap in which Shafia, the girls' father, was heard saying that even if he is hoisted to the gallows, nothing is more important than his honour.

"They betrayed us. They betrayed Islam. They betrayed everything," Shafia says in the recorded conversation.

Accounts of the trial have been disturbing for Sikander Ziad Hashmi, imam at the Islamic Society of Canada in Kingston.

There should be no ambiguity about the position of the community about so-called honour killings, he said. "We needed to be clear ... to tell everyone that this is wrong. Islam does not condone it."

Among other things, the special sermon says, "Domestic violence and, in the extreme, practices such as killing to restore family honour violate clear and non-negotiable Islamic principles."

Nobody should take what comes out of this trial as having its source in Islam, Hashmi added.

Many Canadians will recognize that the trial and its tragic nature are not representative of what mainstream Islam is about, said Ihsaan Gardee, executive director of Canadian Council on American Islamic Relations-Canada.

"It boils down to what it is: a horrific crime," he said.



"We needed to be clear ... Islam doesn't condone it," Sikander Ziad Hashmi, imam at the Islamic Society of Canada in Kingston, says of the idea of honour killings.

HARRISON SMITH/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

The common sermon next Friday is the first step in tackling the issue of domestic violence. Community leaders plan to make resources available for mediation, conflict resolution and domestic violence.

“We want to organize workshops at different mosques,” Kanji said. “Fighting this ... is a firm commitment and we are giving it priority.”