



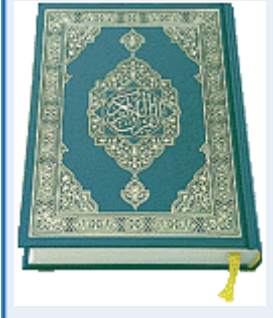
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Valley Muslims Outraged at the Arizona Republic Newspaper Valley Muslims Outraged

By Janan Ahmad
 On July 31, 2005 in the Arizona Republic Newspaper cartoonist Steven Benson illustrated a small number of Muslims standing to the side of a large Mosque carrying a sign that read "Muslims for peace and understanding" while at the same time one mouthed "Yes, this is somewhat unfortunate, but if it weren't for the U.S. foreign policy..." In the same cartoon Benson portrayed the majority of Muslims attending the large mosque as extremist by the sign outside the mosque showing the week's schedule as "Monday through Sunday fatwahs : death to the Western Infidel" and Muslims handing out "Balloons and Bombs for the Kids".

Many Muslims and Islamic organizations in the Valley were outraged by the cartoon and articles printed in the Arizona Republic Newspaper. One of the writers was M. Zuhdi Jasser who wrote articles that led to Benson's poor depiction of Muslims. Jasser wrote, "As we all began digesting the news of the terror attacks in London, most of America's Muslim Organizations issued what has become a predictable, yet empty, round of condemnations." Jasser's solution to what he perceives is a problem in the community is as follows, "It's time to build an anti-terror ethos within the Islamic community. We can publicly embarrass radical imams and organizations that preach hatred. We can publicly expose the twisted interpretations of the Quran and Muslim teachings perpetuated by radical Islamists who justify killing innocent people in the name of our God. We can focus the public agenda of American Muslims on publicizing our commitment to our citizenship oath and to the American secular form of democratic government." Marwan Sadeddin, Coordinator of the Imam's Council of Arizona was furious and stated, "All mosques condemned numerous times all the terrorist acts and the imams are not obligated to do more just to satisfy the Arizona Republic Newspaper. All imams of all the mosques in Arizona preach good moral behavior and good citizenship." The Council on American-Islamic Relations of Arizona, CAIR-AZ, took immediate steps to rectify the misleading articles and cartoon. First, CAIR-AZ asked all the Muslims in Arizona to contact the Arizona Republic Newspaper via fax, phone, or email and state the following: • The Arizona Republic Newspaper needs to issue an apology to the Muslim community for printing such an inflammatory and offensive cartoon. • The accusation that Muslim parents are raising terrorists holds no merits • in Islamic teachings. • This is a direct attack on a house of worship in the United States of America. • Benson accuses all Muslims of blaming US foreign policy as the cause of terrorism, and this resonates against freedom of speech. • Whether we speak out or are silent, Benson has sentenced us to be doomed. • We urge the editor and publisher of the Arizona Republic to take necessary action against Steve Benson. His racist views do not help curb hate crimes against law abiding American Muslims but increases them. Then CAIR-AZ requested a meeting with the editors of the Arizona Republic to discuss their concern. CAIR-AZ has for over two years attempted to schedule a meeting with the Newspaper; therefore, it came as a surprise to them when the Arizona Republic did grant them a meeting. Deedra Abboud-Executive Director of MAS Freedom Foundation, Ahsan Ahmad-CAIR-AZ Board, Muhammad As'ad-Spokesman for the Islamic Center of Tucson, and Aneesah Nadir-Islamic Social Services Association met with Phil Boas-Assistant Editorial Page Editor, Ken Western-Editor of the Editorial Pages, and Kathleen Ingley-Reporter. Abboud and As'ad were taken aback by the reception and response by the staff of the Arizona Republic. "The editors were hostile and very sensitive to criticism. They were not friendly to us but civil," said As'ad. However, As'ad did feel he did make a connection with Ken Western. "They were not open to anything we had to say and they quickly put us in the defensive position when they fired question after question about what is happening in Iraq, Palestine, and Iran," stated Abboud. On the contrary, Phil Boas felt the meeting was productive and expressed that in the meeting the Arizona Republic staff and CAIR-AZ Representatives were speaking frankly. "Our impression of the meeting was very positive and we left the meeting very happy," stated Boas. When asked regarding the Muslim Community's attempts to condemn the terrorist acts and the Arizona Republic Newspaper's lack of giving them credit for that he stated, "They not only should condemn terrorism but should also name names, for example condemn terrorist acts in Palestine." Even though the meeting did not produce the results that the Muslim Community wanted CAIR-AZ is looking at it in an optimistic manner. "The meeting with the Arizona Republic Newspaper is a positive step in establishing a relationship with them," stated CAIR-AZ Office Manager Bushra Khan. CAIR-AZ Board Member Hasan Al Saad agreed with Khan, "What is great about CAIR's philosophy is that even though we were disappointed of the outcome from the meeting we are patient and will persevere in pursuing another meeting with higher ranking editors of the Arizona Republic Newspaper to obtain justice."

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