

Hamiltonians surround Muslim places of worship with circles of solidarity and love

Worshippers share their thanks and call for help confronting Islamophobia

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Dozens of Hamiltonians formed a chain around the city's Downtown Mosque during Friday afternoon prayers as a show of love and support. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

Worshippers attending Friday afternoon prayers at Hamilton's Downtown Mosque were met with a long line of smiling supporters, linking hands in a chain of love, protection and solidarity.

The faithful flocking to the mosque responded with smiles of their own, words of thanks and a heartfelt request for help ending Islamophobia and white supremacy.

The call for solidarity circles at Muslim places of worship across the city went out after attacks at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand left 50 people dead and dozens of others injured.

"[It's] telling our Muslim neighbours that you matter, we love you, we support you and we want to make sure you can pray and worship in safety and peace," explained Lyla Miklos, who helped organize the circles.

"This is about establishing the kind of Hamilton ... we want to live in and appreciating and respecting people for their differences."

There were plenty of appreciative honks for the string of people along York Boulevard holding signs calling for an end to hate.



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Laura Wolfson said she came out because freedom of religion is a fundamental Canadian right, and something she feels is essential.

"What happened last week scared the s--t out of me," she said. "If we don't say something to stand up for each other visibly then we're complicit in the kind of anger and hate that causes people like that guy in New Zealand to do what he did."



Worshippers posed for pictures with police and shook hands with officers after their prayers. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

David Anderson, the Anglican Archdeacon for Hamilton-Haldimand was there in his full church regalia, shaking hands and greeting people on their way inside.

"I wanted to show the colours a little bit," he explained, pointing to his robes. "We stand together against hatred and stand in solidarity and love. We believe there's a place in our Hamilton for everyone."



Archdeacon David Anderson shakes hands with a worshipper outside of the Downtown Hamilton Mosque. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

Adam Zakaria stopped to take photos of the chain on his way to pray.

He said he's still shaken up by what happened in New Zealand, but said seeing the chain gave him something to celebrate.

"It was terrible, inhumane, but what I can see now, with the Canadian people supporting the Muslim community, this is a great stand and great support," he said.



Adam Zakaria described the chain of supporters outside the mosque as something he'll never forget. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

"We will never forget this," Zakaria added. "This is something cheerful and very patriotic. It shows love, it shows compassion and shows respect for all religions."

Muslims need help fighting Islamophobia

Sabreina and Batool Dahab were also encouraged by the show of support, but said a one-day event isn't enough.

"It means a lot and does make us feel good, but I think there's still a larger conversation that needs to be had about the reality of white supremacy, even in our own city," Sabreina explained.

She pointed out Canadians often like to pretend violent attacks don't happen here, but the Quebec City mosque shooting in 2017 shows that's not true.

"We need to confront things when they actually happen. We can't wait until people are killed to talk about white supremacy."



From left, Kianna-Elyssia Springer, Batool Dahab and Sabreina Dahab said they were encouraged by the show of support, but added people need to speak out against Islamophobia for there to be real change. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

Batool also voiced her appreciation for the "amazing" stand, but said that support needs to continue before it can help bring real change.

"I'm very happy and grateful to see quite a few people standing out here to support us and show their love," she said. "But I think just standing out here is not enough. Muslims and black people can't keep fighting racism and Islamophobia on our own. It needs to come from people who hold positions of power and have privilege."



The chain of supports was a way of showing there's a place in Hamilton for everyone, said organizers. (Dan Taekema/CBC News)

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