

Vandalism at mosque, interfaith display, suspected as hate crimes

By Salvador Hernandez

MISSION VIEJO – The Council on American-Islamic Relations denounced two incidents of what it called "anti-Islam hate" after a Quran was found burned in a mosque parking lot and a Muslim component of a holiday display was defaced, both on New Year's Day. Munira Syeda, spokeswoman for CAIR, said that although the two incidents were reported on the same day, they do not appear to be related.

A copy of the Quran was found burned outside the Islamic Education Center of Orange County in Costa Mesa by a member of the mosque who was visiting for Friday prayers, the mosque said. "This deplorable incident is a form of anti-Islamic assault, hate-crime, and terror campaign against American Muslims," read a statement issued by the mosque, which said the Costa Mesa Police Department is investigating.



A burned copy of the Quran was found in the parking lot of a Costa Mesa Mosque, one of two incidents reported to law enforcement on New Years Day.

In Mission Viejo, a display that included a verse from the Quran was vandalized with what appeared to be red spray paint, said Lt. Mike Gavin, chief of police services for the city. Deputies were called to the intersection of La Paz Road and Chrisanta Drive just after 12 p.m. Friday after the vandalism was discovered. A printed note was left on the Muslim portion of the interfaith display, which read: "No Islamic Lighthouses in the U.S.A.," Gavin said. The vandalism occurred sometime between 1:30 a.m. and 11:45 a.m., but no witnesses have come forward so far, he said. Christian and Jewish parts of the interfaith display were not vandalized.

The vandalism prompted leaders of other religious faiths to offer support, including Congregation Eilat in Mission Viejo, which sent a letter to the Orange County Islamic Foundation in Mission Viejo. "I am embarrassed and appalled at this blatant display of hate against your community," wrote Rabbi Diane Cohen. "It is truly unfortunate that at a time when all Americans should stand together against extremist fears, people with small minds and narrow souls seek not to unite us but to divide us."

Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, said the two New Year's Day incidents were the first and only two hate crimes that have been reported to the agency in 2010. "I think these are clearly hate-motivated incidents," Kennedy said. "It's kind of sad."

Officials of the Islamic Education Center said a similar incident had occurred a month earlier, when another copy of the Quran was found burning in the parking lot. The mosque had also been vandalized in the last three weeks, according to CAIR officials.



A printed note was found on a vandalized portion of an interfaith display in Mission Viejo Friday.