

'No, I'm Not a Terrorist' Says Speaker at Centralia College

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'No, I am Not a Terrorist'

Zohra Sarwari, an international speaker, addresses a crowd at the Corbet Theatre in Centralia on Tuesday night. In her presentation titled "No, I am Not a Terrorist," Sarwari addressed muslim stereotypes.

An internationally-known speaker took to the stage at Corbet Theatre on the Centralia College campus on Tuesday night, sharing information on her faith while attempting to clear what she described as misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Zohra Sarwari, an author of 14 books, was born in Afghanistan and later attended public schools in New York, Virginia and California. She began researching Islam in earnest about nine years ago.

She now spends her time traveling the nation and educating people on what she has learned to be the truth behind Islam and Muslims.

On Tuesday, during a presentation titled "No, I'm Not a Terrorist," she defined terrorism, explained what Islam means to her and provided an explanation for why Muslim women dress the way they do.

Sarwari defined terrorism as an act taken when a person decides to inflict terror and pain on another human being without caring about the outcome.

She provided examples of terrorist attacks that weren't necessarily called as such in the media. In 2010, a pilot identified as Andrew Joseph Stack III crashed a small aircraft into an office building of the Internal Revenue Service in Texas, killing several people.

Then there is the Aurora, Colorado, theater shooting where James Eagan Holmes shot 71 people, killing 12 of them.

After describing examples of what she called terrorist attacks carried out by primarily white males, she then discussed the differences in media coverage when similarly violent acts were carried out by Muslims.

"We didn't call him a terrorist, we called him crazy," she said of Holmes. "Why is he crazy and when a Muslim does it, he's a terrorist?" She went on to say that many media outlets now say that all Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslim.

"All terrorist activities that are happening are by Muslims, this is not true, they're not showing the other side of it," Sarwari said.

Sarwari described Islam as a belief in God, the same deity Christians and Jews believe in.

Islam, according to Sarwari, means to have obedience and peace with the creator and his creations. She said it is a peaceful religion that does not condone murder or suicide.

She said extremist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda take verses from the Koran out of context to further their mission.

"In any religion you have an extremist group unfortunately," Sarwari said. "And unfortunately they will find their own meaning from whatever books they have."

The depiction of today's Muslims is what has caused the fear behind the religion of Islam, she said.

"We are not uncivilized people. What the acts of some Muslims do should not portray Islam or the teachings of the prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him," she said. "It should be portrayed on who they are in their own cultures and their own ignorance ... 99 percent of (Muslims) don't want anything but peace, exactly what you want." Wearing one of the traditional styles of Islam, Sarwari sported a jilbab, a full-length outer garment that covers the body and the head.

She said Muslim women dress the way they do for one reason and only one reason: because God demanded it in the Koran. God created women in a beautiful way, she said, and the clothing serves as protection from evil in the world, or otherwise from men who may not be able to control themselves.

"Sometimes it's very difficult thing for men to have that control," she said, mentioning molestation and rape. "If it was not a commandment in the Koran, I guarantee we

would not dress like this.”

After her presentation, the audience was able to ask questions about Islam and Muslims, questions Sarwari addressed straight on.

Her take-home message was simple: Muslims should not be feared because of the wrongful acts of some extremist groups. She said it is the duty of each individual to seek the truth about any religion, instead of buying into stereotypes.

“I want to help you understand because that’s the whole nature of Islam. It should be understood because our religion has been hijacked and not only by extremist terrorist groups like ISIS but hater groups all over the world including America,” she said. “... It’s only through evidence and due diligence that you will come to the truth.”

Shelley Bannish, director of student life at the college, told The Chronicle previously it is important for speakers such Sarwari to spread correct information. She said she believes the college has a responsibility to bring diverse speakers and topics for the community to discuss.