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Imam delivers message to Trump at inaugural service

By Daniel Burke

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An imam who had been expected to deliver the Islamic call to prayer at an interfaith religious service for President Donald Trump instead recited two verses from the Quran that contained clear political messages for the new president and his administration.

Imam Mohamed Magid, executive director of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, is a well-known figure in Washington, but he had been sharply criticized by fellow Muslims for agreeing to take part in the event Saturday at Washington National Cathedral.

Magid was one of 26 religious leaders from a diverse array of faiths to participate in the service, an inaugural tradition since George Washington. The event's program said Magid would recite the "Muslim call to prayer," leading many to believe he would intone the *adhan*, the melodic call to worship that issues forth from many mosques five times a day.

Instead, the imam chose two passages from the Quran with clear political implications, especially at a time of racial and religious strife, when many American Muslims feel marginalized and mistrusted.

Addressing the capitol's power brokers, including Trump's family and Vice President Michael Pence, Magid read first in Arabic and then provided an English translation.

The first verse he read was from Surah Al-Hujarat, in which God says:

"O humankind, We have created you a single male and female (Adam and Eve) and made you into nations and tribes and communities, that you may know one another. Really, the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you, and God has all knowledge..."

The second verse he read was from Surah Ar-Rum:

"And among the signs of God is the creation of heaven and earth, and the variation in your languages and your colors. Verily, in that are signs for those who know."

A spokesman for Magid said his recitation of the verses had been approved by officials at the Washington National Cathedral.

"After the election, when a lot of things were said about Muslims, and there were questions about Muslims' loyalty, these verses were intended to convey the message that we must come together and respect diversity -- that God made us this way," said Rizwan Jaka, board chairman at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society.

Like Magid, Episcopalians had been criticized for hosting and praying with Trump, whose campaign included harsh language about Muslims, Mexicans and women.

The Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of the cathedral, also chose a prayer that spoke to the country's divisive political climate, asking God to "break down the walls that separate us" and "take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts."

Praying with the president

For years, Magid has been a familiar face at interfaith and government events in Washington.

He has met with former President Barack Obama to discuss fatherhood and hosted members of Obama's administration at the large complex of Islamic centers Magid leads in Northern Virginia. Last year, the FBI gave that complex, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, a community leadership award for strengthening ties between local Muslims and law enforcement.

From 2010-14, Magid led the Islamic Society of North America, whose conferences draw thousands of Muslims each year, and the genial Sudanese-American regularly makes the list of the world's 500 most influential Muslims.

But some American Muslims criticized Magid for agreeing to take part in the National Prayer Service with Trump.

Many American Muslims have accused Trump of stoking suspicion about their religion by saying "Islam hates us," proposing a registry to monitor Muslims and pledging, at one time, to bar Muslims from entering the United States. (That plan may be modified to "extreme vetting," Trump's team says.) The president's new National Security Adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, has called Islam a "cancer."

Before Saturday's service, Hussam Ayloush, who heads the Council of American-Islamic Relations' Los Angeles chapter, compared Trump to the proverbial emperor without any clothes and urged Magid not to "hand him a towel."

"In the face of unreluctant and unrepentant defamation and animosity toward Islam and Muslims (and many other communities) by this Trump team, a symbolic participation that does not involve any opportunity to preach or make a statement does not qualify as engaging or correcting the wrongdoers, but rather enabling them and providing them with a token cover for their bigotry," Ayloush said in a statement.

Ayloush also said that Magid's role in the prayer service "undermines the courageous and principled activism of so many Muslims and allies" who have challenged Trump's rhetoric and proposals.

In response, Magid said the role of religious leaders is "to share the truth and values of Islam to everyone, including those in power. "

"Do not assume that the efforts to engage those who have misconceptions of Islam are in any way contradictory to other efforts to influence public opinion," the imam said. "Rather they go hand in hand."

Muslim-Americans need to share their message both through public protests and private meetings with government officials, Magid said, implying that the Prophet Mohammed would agree.

"Many people came to do harm to Prophet Mohammed, and after engagement and getting to know him they changed their mind in a positive manner."