

Quebec Mosque Reopens to Public 6 Years After Attack



Six men died in the attack on the Quebec Mosque.

QUEBEC (CBC) -- Six years after the deadly mosque attack in Quebec City, the Muslim community will gather in the same room where six men were killed and 19 injured on Jan. 29, 2017.

Mamadou Tanou Barry, Ibrahim Barry, Khaled Belkacemi, Abdelkrim Hassane, Azzeddine Soufiane and Aboubaker Thabti were killed shortly after evening prayers when a gunman opened fire just before 8 p.m. in the Islamic Cultural Centre in the Sainte-Foy neighborhood.

The attack that left 17 children fatherless and a community forever scarred will be commemorated as organizers also point to the importance of continuing to reflect on Islamophobia — particularly as hate and far-right extremism continues across Canada.

"It's very emotionally charged," said Maryam Bessiri, a spokesperson for the Commémoration citoyenne de l'attentat, the group organizing the event.

Speaking at a news conference at the mosque, she said it will be the first time the community gathers inside the mosque on the anniversary. This year, it falls on a Sunday, the same day the attack occurred six years ago.

"It's very significant for us. We're asking the population and all Quebecers who want to participate, to come to the Islamic Cultural Centre on Sunday... [It's] part of our mission to be open and share with people."

Bessiri notes that organizers and volunteers tried to use this anniversary as a jumping-off point — an opportunity to remember the lives lost while showcasing the work the Muslim community is doing to move past pervasive racism.

"For us, it gives us a voice to talk about Islamophobia, racism and also about how we have overcome the past six years and give the young people an opportunity to speak... Each year we ask ourselves the same question about the pertinence of organizing a commemoration so that we can move beyond the tragedy that occurred," said Bessiri.

"I would like to remind everyone that the commemoration on January 29 is the only occasion when we speak about Islamophobia in Quebec. We don't speak about it outside of this, and that is unfortunate," said Bessiri.

She noted that last year, they were planning the fifth commemoration right as the trucker convoy was starting in Ottawa — an event marked by demonstrations that pushed forward multiple far-right views.

"This shows us how fast progress can deteriorate and the discourse of the far right is always present... That's why in organizing the commemoration each year, in opening the doors, we are trying to counter this discourse," said Bessiri, adding that the attacker was radicalized through extreme discourse over time.

Amira Elghawaby, Canada's first and newly appointed representative to combat Islamophobia, says many assumptions about Muslim communities derive from pop culture and news stories which present a "narrow understanding of who Muslims are."

"I'm sure all of us would agree we all have the right to go to a place of worship free of fear. We all have a right to go for a walk with our family," said Elghawaby, referring to the 2021 attack on a Muslim family in London, Ont., when a mother, father, daughter and grandmother were killed while walking in their neighborhood, struck by a truck.

She said one of her primary concerns is that Canada has had a high number of hate-motivated fatalities against Muslims.

"That to me is shocking because I grew up here, I grew up believing in the promise

of multiculturalism," said Elghawaby.

"I believe in that promise and I'm going to really do my best to fulfill the promise of a country that is inclusive, that is diverse and that is strong because of it."

Muhammad Labidi, president of the Islamic centre, says as part of the commemoration they want to welcome non-Muslims into the mosque.

"We meet our fellow citizens with the purpose of demystifying the mosque and give them a chance to speak with Muslims to take another step toward living together as a community," said Labidi.

"Time passes... It's our duty to remember."

While the Muslim community feels a special duty to remember the attack and its victims, one survivor says Quebec society has a responsibility too.

"When we talk about society we're talking about the government, the media, our neighbors and our colleagues at work, we're talking about everyone. This responsibility has to be shared," said Ahmed Cheddadi.

Before the attack, he says the media often participated in creating a "climate of Islamophobia."

The organizers highlighted how a recent Quebec law, Bill 21 — which bans public servants from wearing religious symbols such as hijabs — undoes some of the progress the community has been trying to make.

Cheddadi said his own family is struggling with the law.

"I have a 15-year-old daughter and she doesn't wear the hijab yet, that's normal. But we have discussed it. She wants to be a teacher, that's her dream. She told me, 'Dad, do you think if I wear the hijab I will lose the opportunity to do my dream job?'" said Cheddadi as his voice broke.

"I said 'unfortunately, yes sweetie, you will lose this opportunity in Quebec.'"

He noted the only solace he could offer her is reminding her that she could move out of the province.

Boufeldja Benabdallah, the co-founder of the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre, says this kind of limit on symbols of faith targets women and takes away a big part of their religious freedom.

"That law is hurting our community... And that negatively impacts the effort for us to live together as a community, said Benabdallah.

He says he wants to ensure the work his community put in over the past few years is not undone by laws that divide people. He reminded people at the news conference of why they first started the tradition of commemoration in the first place.

"The families told us on the first commemoration, 'please we cannot forget our husbands who died in the mosque,'" said Benabdallah.

"I want to tell the family that we are standing with them. It's an event that's dedicated to all those who were taken."

Eight Countries Attend Fajr International Theater Festival

TEHRAN — Eight countries have participated in the theatrical meeting on the sidelines of the 41st edition of the Fajr International Theater Festival.

Some 34 experts in the sphere of theater took part in the meeting. Also, the prestigious event is to host 40 plays in the national competition.

Foreign troupes from Brazil,

Russia, Oman, Spain, Iraq, Armenia, Tunisia, and Jordan have taken part in the artistic event.

The 41st edition of the Fajr International Theater Festival features a scientific section during which twenty papers from ten Muslim countries were presented on January 27 and 28.



Malaysian PM Tours Festival Featuring Iranian Works



TEHRAN — Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has paid a visit to the Restu Global Quranic Arts Festival, which is underway in the Southeast Asian country.

Touring different parts of the festival's exhibition in Putrajaya, he talked to Iranian artists attending the cultural event and praised their artworks, which include calligraphy and calligraphy-painting works and engraved rings.

Iranian Ambassador to Malaysia Ali Asghar Muhammadi and Cultural Attaché Muhammad Oraei Karimi accompanied the Malaysian top official during the visit.

The Restu Global Quranic Arts Festival has been organized in Putrajaya by Restu Foundation and foreign partners including

the Iranian Cultural Center in Malaysia.

It kicked off on January 20, 2023, and will run for ten days. Four countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, are participating in the festival.

The event allows visitors to witness special exhibitions, and interact with the Qur'an and Islamic arts and Islamic products entrepreneurs while also trying to improve the image of Islam as an inclusive and peaceful religion.

Introducing the preservation and prosperity of the Qur'an, glorifying the teachings of Islam, inviting the community to love knowledge and scholars, utilizing modern technology as an effective preaching medium, and trying to return the Muslim community to its true identity have been named among other objectives of the event.

Rare White Lion Cub Born in Iran



TEHRAN -- Here is a photo of an adorable white lion cub named Sana recently born in the Iranian province of Alborz.

Director of Chamran Park Wildlife Conservation Center said to the local media that the rare cub was born in the province's Ranger park.

Majid Dargi added, "Three years ago, 2 white lions were brought from South Africa to Alborz Province, which are kept" in the conservation center of Chamran park.

He also said the three-year-and-five-month-old lioness "named 'Dana' gave birth to her cub," but the cub was not nursed by the mother.

Many animals kept in captivity exhibit this behavior and reject their offspring.

The tiny bundle of joy, fed with special formula milk, is reportedly quite healthy and in the capable hands of Iranian veterinarians.

White lions are very valuable as they are few in number across the globe.

Iranian Documentary Awarded in France

TEHRAN -- Iranian documentary 'Silent House' has won an award at the Festival International de Programmes FIPOADOC in France.

The documentary directed by Farnaz Jourabchinan grabbed the MITRANI award at this year's edition of the event.

Produced by Elaheh Nobakht, 'Silent House' tells the story of a family in Tehran during decades.

The film is a coproduction of Iran, Canada, France, Philippine and Qatar.

FIPADOC is an international documentary film festival held annually in Biarritz which brings members of the public and professionals together for screenings of a selection of outstanding documentary films.

Hosting meet-and-greets and premiering new projects, FIPADOC is committed to promoting impact, innovation, image appreciation, and new talent.

This year's edition of the event was held on January 20-28, 2023.



Picture of the Day



Zayanderud Dam in Isfahan after the recent snowfall.

Photo by Fars News

How to Entertain Kids Published in Persian

TEHRAN -- A helpful book, 'How to Entertain, Distract, and Unplug Your Kids: Tricks, Tools, and Spontaneous Screen-Free Activities' (2015) by American author Matthew Jervis has been published in Persian.

A fun and practical guide

to keeping kids engaged and off your phone, this book has been translated into Persian by Soulmaz Dini and Zahra Fathi. Arjmand Publishing has released 'How to Entertain, Distract, and Unplug Your Kids' in 128 pages.