

Muslim Man Trying to Enact Sharia Law in Minnesota

A man trying to impose what he calls “the civil part of the sharia law” in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis has sparked anger among local residents and Muslim leaders.

In an April 13, 2017 report in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* newspaper ([link](#)), Faiza Mahamud writes that Abdullah Rashid, 22, a Georgia native who moved to the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis last year, says his group, General Presidency of the Religious Affairs and Welfare of the Ummah (Muslim “community”), is trying to enforce what he calls “the civil part of the sharia law” in the area.

Cedar-Riverside, also referred to as the West Bank, is a neighborhood within Minneapolis, Minnesota. Its boundaries are the Mississippi River to the north and east, Interstate 94 to the south, and Hiawatha Avenue and Interstate 35W to the west.

Abdullah Rashid has been making the rounds in the Somali-dominated neighborhood, telling people not to drink, use drugs or interact with the opposite sex. If he sees Muslim women he believes are dressed inappropriately, he approaches them and suggests they should wear a jilbab, a long, flowing garment. And he says he’s recruiting others to join the effort.

But the *Star Tribune* report says local Muslim leaders are sounding the alarm. They are working to stop Rashid’s group, General Presidency of the Religious Affairs and Welfare of the Ummah, and have notified Minneapolis police, who say he’s being banned from a Cedar-Riverside property. Some say the group is preying on vulnerable young Muslims in a community that has dealt with national scrutiny around radicalization and terrorism.

“What he’s doing is wrong and doesn’t reflect the community at

all,” said Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), according to the newspaper report.

The newspaper says Minneapolis police received reports in February from concerned residents who saw Rashid in a dark green uniform that said “Muslim Defense Force” and “Religious Police” and had two flags associated with ISIS and other terrorist groups.

“We’ve had conversations with community members that live over there,” said Officer Corey Schmidt, a police spokesman. “Sometimes it takes a little bit of time to deal with it, but it’s something we’ve been monitoring.”

Jeff Van Nest, an FBI spokesman for Minneapolis, declined to comment.

In a recent interview with the newspaper, Rashid said he aims to turn Cedar-Riverside into a “sharia-controlled zone” where Muslims are learning about the proper practices of Islam and that “non-Muslims are asked to respect” it.

“People who don’t know me would say I’m a terrorist,” he said. “I’m someone who’s dedicated to Islam and trying to help the community all ways I can.”

But the newspaper says the Islamic Institute of Minnesota issued a statement Wednesday saying Rashid “does not in any way speak for the Islamic Institute of Minnesota or the Muslims in Minnesota.”

“We consider this matter as a dangerous precedent and a threat in our country and our way of life,” the statement said. “We ask our law enforcement agencies to consider this grave matter to protect Minnesotans.”

Denied Permit to Carry

The newspaper explains that Sharia law is a guide to daily

life for practicing Muslims, derived from the Qur'an and the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. It tells Muslims, for example, what to eat and not to eat. Its interpretation and practice vary around the world.

The newspaper says Rashid, who was previously known as Devon James Miller, converted to Islam in 2009. He said he first started the religious police group in Georgia in 2013, and wants to grow it internationally.

He married a Somali-American woman, who had recently moved from Wyoming to Minneapolis, in 2015. They moved to Cedar-Riverside in 2016.

According to the newspaper report, in late 2016, he applied for a permit to carry a handgun, which was denied by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, saying there was evidence that he is a danger to himself and others if allowed a permit to carry a gun.

The newspaper says Rashid sued, and court documents show he has had run-ins with law enforcement in the past. He was arrested as a juvenile in Walton County, Georgia, for impersonating a police officer, and a school district reported he had harassed a 16-year-old classmate on Facebook, according to the documents. The school district report mentioned he had mental health issues, and his mother said he had been suicidal.

The newspaper reported that Rashid's lawsuit was dismissed in March. He said he does not have a mental illness, and his wife, Kadro Abdullahi, said that Rashid is not mentally ill and that she supports his work. "He's a man with a good personality, and he loves Islam," Abdullahi said.

The newspaper goes on to say that residents of the Cedar-Riverside Plaza complex have raised concerns about him, and management with Sherman Associates said they are aware of the group and working closely with law enforcement.

On Wednesday, Minneapolis police said the Cedar-Riverside Towers' management is in the process of evicting Rashid, and security at Cedar-Riverside Plaza is advising him he's not allowed to patrol the neighborhood or they will cite him for trespassing.

'Against His Ideas'

Rashid, who initially said he was working with Minneapolis police, said he is continuing his effort to provide security and protect Muslims' civil rights. He said he has enlisted a group of 10 men, ages 18 and 25, to help him patrol the area.

Meanwhile, some in the community are confused about what Rashid is doing.

Salma Mohamed, a mother of four, met with him recently at Brian Coyle Community Center, seeking advice on a custody case. A friend had referred her to Rashid, unaware of his controversial activities. She was startled by his uniform, she said, and his talk about terrorism and the young Muslim men who were convicted of trying to join ISIS.

"I was expecting the guy was a lawyer," Mohamed said. "He just brought up things that weren't even on the discussion table."

The newspaper further reported that on his website, Rashid posted a video titled "Never Trust Non-Muslims" by Anwar al-Awlaki, leader of an Al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2011. He had initially listed the Masjid Shaafici Cultural Center in Cedar-Riverside address as his organization's headquarters.

The newspaper stated the imam of that mosque, Abdighani Ali, said it has nothing to do with Rashid's group. Ali said he plans to file a complaint with police.

"We're against his ideas," Ali said. "We always encourage our community to be a part of the society." {eo}

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