

'We will stand with you,' Trudeau tells Muslim community

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OTTAWA - A solemn Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke of sadness and solidarity with Canada's Muslim community Monday as the country reeled amid the aftermath of a deadly, hate-fuelled "act of terror" at a mosque in Quebec City.

On Parliament's first day back following the Christmas break, Trudeau sang the praises of diversity and inclusion at a time when the country he leads is grappling with a profound shift in the other direction south of the border.

"It was an attack on our most intrinsic and cherished values as Canadians - values of openness, diversity and freedom of religion," he said of the shooting that claimed the lives of six people and injured a dozen others Sunday night.



"To the more than 1 million Canadians who profess the Muslim faith, I want to say directly: we are with you; 36 million hearts are breaking with yours."

It was too early to know - one way or the other - what motivated the gunman who opened fire during evening prayers inside the Centre culturel islamique de Quebec, a mosque in the Sainte-Foy neighbourhood of the provincial capital.

Trudeau's words took on extra resonance given the broader context of chaos, confusion and anxiety around the world that has accompanied U.S. President Donald Trump's immigration ban on people coming from Muslim-majority countries.

"Know that we value you, that you enrich our shared country in immeasurable ways. It is your home."

Earlier Monday, Trudeau spoke directly with his U.S. counterpart, who expressed his condolences and offered any necessary assistance.

Other party leaders also addressed the Commons, including interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose, who described the attacks as an affront to freedom of religion.

"An attack against a place of worship, against people praying in a mosque, is an attack on these very freedoms," Ambrose said. "It negates the principles on which Canada was founded."

NDP Leader Tom Mulcair said Canadians stand with their Muslim brothers and sisters.

"We mourn with them, we pray with them, and we promise that we will stand united and fight against the forces of hatred, bigotry, Islamophobia, and against those who peddle the politics of fear and division," he said.

Green party Leader Elizabeth May also urged solidarity. "Today, we are all Muslims," she said.

Trudeau and his fellow leaders later travelled to Quebec City to attend an evening vigil - a rare show of cross-partisan unity that helped to demonstrate the sheer magnitude of the tragedy.

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau comments on the Quebec City mosque shootings in the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Monday, Jan. 30, 2017. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Adrian Wylde



Police attend the scene of a shooting at a Quebec City mosque on Monday January 30, 2017. A shooting at a Quebec City mosque left six people dead

MPs are scheduled to hold an emergency debate Tuesday about on the U.S. travel ban, as well as the indefinite halt to the U.S. Syrian refugee program, to explore what it could end up meaning for Canadians.

Liberal MP Joel Lightbound, who represents the riding of Louis-Hebert where the attack took place, said he knows the local Muslim community well - as soccer teammates, neighbours, business owners, university professors and friends.

Wary of pointing an accusatory finger in any particular direction, Lightbound acknowledged that Muslims in his community have been sharing their fears of feeling increasingly unwelcome over the past few years.

The mosque had been a target before, he noted: a disembodied pig's head was left outside the entrance during the holy month of Ramadan last summer.

"We need to respond to those who instill these sentiments and fear of others and hatred of others," Lightbound said. "We need to respond boldly in favour of openness, of tolerance and pluralism."

Indeed, there was broad reluctance among MPs to draw a direct line between the shooting and the recent rise of anti-Muslim sentiment south of the border, or to take specific issue with the man responsible for the policies being enacted in the U.S.

Former immigration minister John McCallum, meanwhile, who is soon headed overseas to be the Canadian ambassador to China, was asked what Canada should say to its southern neighbour and largest trading partner.

"Sometimes," McCallum reasoned, "the best diplomatic response is silence."

and eight others injured Sunday. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Paul Chiasson



Police survey the scene of a shooting at a Quebec City mosque on Sunday January 29, 2017. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Francis Vachon

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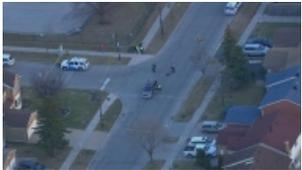


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