

NY-AMANI project CHANGES FEAR INTO AWARENESS

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The tragic events of 9-11 and the more recent Boston Bombing have raised a host of negative perceptions of Islam in American society. A general unfamiliarity with Muslims and fear tactics has been used to misrepresent Islam by the media and politicians. Exemplified by the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy, a wave of anti-Muslim rhetoric and activities around the country only seem to have worsened.

North America has always been a majority Protestant nation, and the integration of minority groups into the American mainstream has always been difficult. But the general mistrust of Muslims in the aftermath of 9-11 and the Boston Bombing have made integration of Muslims even that more difficult. Data from a 2010 Pew Research Center study found that 53% of Muslims began to experience profound increases in discrimination after 9/11 even through the majority (76%) worry as much, if not more about Muslim extremist than do non-Muslims. In addition, a 2006 Gallup poll revealed that most Americans do not know any Muslims personally and that one in four Americans reported not wanting a Muslim as a neighbor.

As the most diverse nation in the world, it is our moral imperative to provide tools for citizens to learn about cultures and religions that are different. Several organizations have recently emerged to promote interfaith dialogue and to specifically address 'Islamophobia,' or the Fear of Islam. Religions without Borders (RwB) is one such organization committed to facilitating interfaith dialogue, teaching about the common threads between Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and dispelling myths about Muslims. RwB believes the effort to convert fear to awareness is the key to promoting peace for all Americans living in a pluralistic society.

Founded immediately after September 11, RwB has a decade long history of developing international interventions targeted at youth at risk of involvement with extremist groups. Recently the organization extended its efforts in the United States, creating projects such as NY-AMANI, which provides numerous workshops and learning activities at Albany and Boston area universities, places of worship, public and local television programming, and a host of resources through social media. NY-AMANI project is supported partially by The Council on State Support to Non-governmental Organizations under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On January 1, 2014, the NY-AMANI project opened its office located at 34 Jay Street, Schenectady, NY 12304 (adjacent to the Schenectady Access Cable Council). The public is invited to learn more about religious pluralism and upcoming workshops by visiting www. <u>www.nyamaniproject.com</u>. NY-

AMANI staff can also be reached by email at amaniproject.newyork@gmail.com or phone at 518-280-9047.

Amminadab Munyaneza Religions Without Borders USA, Inc 5185726286 email us here

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