

# People protest award given to Orange County Muslim leader

Susan Valot, KPCC



Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi enters the Orange County Human Relations Commission's community leaders awards ceremony in Anaheim Thursday evening.



Protestors waved American flags and signs Thursday night outside the Grove in Anaheim. They protested the Orange County Human Relations Commission honoring local Muslim leader Muzammil Siddiqi with a community leader award.

About 30 people gathered outside the Grove in Anaheim Thursday night to protest an award from the Orange County Human Relations Commission. The protestors say the Muslim community leader honored by the commission is linked to terrorism.

In the shadow of Angel Stadium, protestors sang patriotic songs and waved American flags. They also carried signs that said the Human Relations Commission supports terrorism – and that Islamic laws call for world dominance. The protestors are upset that the Orange County Human Relations Commission was honoring Muzammil Siddiqi with a community leader award for building bridges in the county. The commission stood by its decision to honor Siddiqi, despite the threat of a protest.

"There's a time to stand up for a people and not to be intimidated by innuendos and half truths that are drawn out into some kind of cyber-reality because they're repeated so often. Nothing can be further from the truth than the things that have been claimed," said Rusty Kennedy, director of the O.C. Human Relations Commission. The protestors claim Siddiqi is connected to terrorist groups and wants the U.S. to be under Islamic rule, and that he's lying to accomplish that goal.

Steve Amundson of Garden Grove organized the protest. "This has nothing to do with race. I'm not a racist. I'm not a bigot, a hater, a hater," Amundson said. "I'm just out here presenting the facts, trying to get the public's awareness level up another notch, informing as many people as we can. Absolutely *nothing* to do with race."

Siddiqi denies the allegations of the protestors – many of whom have never spoken to him before. "They are free to have whatever opinion that they would like to have," he said before entering the awards dinner. "I mean, I'm not saying that they must change their mind or anything. But meet and talk and understand each other."

A group of a couple dozen counterprotestors stood across the street, holding a sign that read "Standing on the side of love." Vicki Tamoush of Tustin organized the group, known as Interfaith Witnesses. "Clearly, it's not just that Islamophobia is on the rise. Clearly, hate in general against all groups is on the rise, and I don't mean just faith groups, either," she said. "There's just an increase in hatred in our society. It generally tends to happen when there's a downturn in the economy. People grip onto their fears." Those protestors stood in silence, showing their support for Siddiqi and the Orange County Human Relations Commission.