

O.C. Mosque Vandalized With Spray Painted Threats

CYPRESS -- A Southern California mosque has been vandalized with racial slurs and spray painted threats.

Police Sgt. Tom Bruce said an officer spotted the slurs and expletives painted on the Islamic Center of Cypress on the 5000 block of Ball Road, at 4 a.m. Thursday and the graffiti was still wet to the touch.

The painted lettering was about 4 or 5 feet tall and read, in part: "We will kill you all," according to the Orange County Human Relations Commission.



Cypress police are classifying the vandalism as a hate crime. Police said there were no witnesses and the incident was not caught on surveillance video.

Human relations commission director Rusty Kennedy said it was likely the act was prompted by President Barack Obama's trip to the Middle East. The graffiti was done about an hour after Obama's much-anticipated speech at Cairo University in Egypt, which was aired live.

But Ahmed Mehtar, the mosque's imam, said he wasn't sure of the link. "We don't know the reason behind what was done," he said. "It is upsetting, but since we don't know why it happened, it's hard to say."

Members of the local Muslim community were shaken by the incident, said Shakeel Syed, executive director of the Anaheim-based Islamic Shura Council of Southern California. "Unfortunately, Islamophobia remains healthy and alive and well," he said. "This mosque has always been peaceful. Our concern is rooted in our experiences in other communities across the board where we have seen threatening phone calls, e-mails, and letters." The mosque is one of the smaller ones in Orange County, with anywhere from 50 to several hundred attendees depending on the day and service, Syed said.

Kennedy said there were 79 hate crimes in Orange County in 2008, down slightly from 82 the previous year.