

Calgary Herald

Calgary Muslims protest Israeli action: Jewish spokesman disgusted

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Page: A1 / FRONT

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald / Protesters demonstrate outside City Hall Friday.

More than 1,000 Calgarians marched through downtown Friday in a raucous show of solidarity for Palestinians.

Organized by the Muslim Council of Calgary, calls for peace were made from the steps of City Hall, while some marchers waved placards displaying anti-Israeli slogans and banners, some comparing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to Adolf Hitler.

Police presence was heavy throughout the two-hour rally that saw crowds crushing against the doors of the Harry Hays federal building and breakaway groups running through the streets and into rush hour traffic.

Following the demonstration, a spokesman for Calgary's Jewish community, who attended the rally, said he was disgusted with the public display.

"I went to the rally to see what was happening and, to my chagrin, people in the crowd were carrying signs equating the prime minister of Israel with Adolf Hitler and equating Zionism with Nazism," said Hal Joffe of the Calgary Jewish Community Council.

"But more troubling than that was the carrying of Hezbollah flags, a terrorist organization, and the calls for 'Death to Jews' made in Arabic."

Joffe added the Jewish community doesn't have a problem with local Palestinians, Muslims and Arabs gathering to express solidarity with their Middle Eastern counterparts. But he believes publicly supporting terrorist organizations and threatening to kill people discredits their case.

"What I find shocking is that the organizers didn't try to stop them from chanting 'Death to Jews,'" Joffe said.

The co-ordinator of the city police hate-bias crime unit said they were taking photos of the placards and had several translators present.

"Things (were) orderly, but some of the signs are questionable. We are watching for things that incite hatred," said Const. Doug Jones.

Before marching three blocks from City Hall to the Harry Hays building on 4th Avenue S.E. and back to the U.S. consulate on 6th Avenue S.E., the chairman of the Muslim Council of Calgary urged the protesters to control themselves.

"Please practise restraint in spite of your feelings and frustrations . . . our image is at stake," said Nagah

Hage.

Two rows of riot-control police and one of regular members formed a protective barrier across the entrance to the U.S. consulate, where Hage condemned President George W. Bush for not taking action against Israel.

"The world looks to you for guidance, but you are at a loss to even mildly oppose Israel," said Hage, referring to Bush and the United States.

An 18-year-old Muslim in the crowd said he attended the rally to protest the differences in weaponry between the two groups.

"It is an unfair fight when one nation, Israel, has technological advances and the other has rocks," said Mahmoud Karout.

Calgary's Jewish community hasn't faced any acts of violence against them with the escalation of violence in the Middle East, but are in close contact with law enforcement groups as a precautionary measure.