

March 29-2024

Clarification on Recent Events at the Islamic Society of Toronto on March 25, 2024

Context of the Toronto Police Chief's Invitation to IST

On Monday, March 25, 2024, the Islamic Society of Toronto (IST), Masjid Darussalaam, held its annual community iftar, an event that celebrates the month of Ramadan and aims to foster connections and mutual understanding with our wider community. Traditionally, this gathering has included community leaders, including local politicians, civic service representatives, and educational administrators.

This year, in light of the community's concerns regarding the stance of certain politicians on the Gaza situation, invitations were selectively issued, and IST did not invite representatives from any political spectrum. This decision is consistent with the stance taken by numerous other mosques nationwide.

IST has been at the forefront of advocating for the Palestinian cause, which has deeply affected our congregation. Our efforts have included collaborations with organizations such as the NCCM, initiating letter-writing campaigns to officials, facilitating petition signings among our congregants, providing complimentary bus services to weekly rallies, and hosting seminars on the history of Palestine. Additionally, informational presentations on the history of Palestine adorn our walls.

IST has maintained ongoing discussions with the Toronto Police to address community concerns regarding the handling of public safety during pro-Palestinian protests. To further this dialogue, IST invited the Police Chief and liaison officers for iftar and to address the community's concerns, including concerns regarding Islamophobia.

Why was Brother Naveed Awan asked to leave the Mosque?

Prior to the iftar event, the Imam of the Masjid personally spoke with Br. Naveed. He was informed and advised by the Imam not to address the Police Chief publicly but instead, to engage with him privately after the program had ended. As Br. Naveed wished to voice his concerns and express his opposition to the Chief's actions, IST deemed this approach more appropriate, aligning with Islamic values regarding dialogue and reverence expected within our Masjid.

Regrettably, instead of engaging with the Police Chief in a private meeting, Br. Naveed chose a disruptive form of protest. While Br. Naveed raised valid concerns about the Chief's policies and the Toronto Police's overall approach, his method of protest during iftar (a time reserved for reflection and prayer in our community) was not appropriate.

The need to uphold a space for respect and decorum within the Masjid, necessitated intervention by management. This led to the unfortunate request for him to leave the Masjid premises. This decision was about maintaining Masjid etiquette, not stifling advocacy. Unfortunately, Br. Naveed's refusal to cooperate with these respectful requests escalated the situation, leading to the involvement of Toronto Police officers who then asked him and another brother to depart from the Masjid.

It is important to clarify that the circulating video does not fully capture the entirety of the events, and presents a misleading narrative of the incident.

Response to Concerns By Palestinian Advocacy Organizations

IST values the concerns and the request for clarity expressed in the public letter from several advocacy organizations.

We reaffirm that Br. Naveed's departure was not about his advocacy but about preserving the sanctity and decorum of our Masjid during a spiritual time. He remains welcome in our Masjid.

We understand and share the deep connection our community feels towards the Palestinian cause and the collective pain and frustration that arises from it. We recognize the distress that the Police Chief's presence may have caused, especially among those actively involved in advocacy efforts, including participating in weekly protests to support our brothers and sisters in Gaza.

We invite the organizations that have signed the letter to contact us should they need additional clarification or wish to discuss any further concerns.

We pray for Allah (swt) and ask for His guidance in uniting our hearts, strengthening our community bonds, and persevering in our shared causes.

Management
Islamic Society of Toronto

