

## W.VA. MUSLIMS TO KEEP PRAYING FOR PEACE

*Publication: THE CHARLESTON GAZETTE*

*Published: 03/21/2003*

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Even before the bombs started falling Wednesday night, members of the Islamic community in West Virginia were praying for peace. They will continue to pray for peace and the safety of American troops, their spiritual leader said Thursday.

Mohammad Jamal Daoudi, the imam of the Islamic Association of West Virginia, said he agrees that the world would be better off without Saddam Hussein and his regime. "But I cannot understand thousands of civilians dying for the sake of one, two, three," Daoudi said.

"Saddam does not represent Islam. But in order to get rid of him, should we hurt innocent people?" he said at his office at the Islamic Center in South Charleston.

"This situation is not in our hands right now," he said. "We are saddened. We were praying for peace before. We will really keep praying for peace even though the war started.

"We will be praying for the least amount of casualties on both sides," he said. "We are praying our troops come back as soon as possible without being hurt or hurting others."

He also said he hopes Americans will understand the fears the Iraqi people have. The country has suffered from years of wars and economic sanctions.

He recalled a speech President Bush delivered in February to the American Enterprise Institute in which he pledged to work for a viable Palestinian state. He said he hopes Bush will work as aggressively to make good on that pledge as he is working to implement the resolutions against Iraq.

If America makes good on Bush's pledge for the Palestinians, that will improve America's credibility in the world, he said.

He said he was also concerned about America going to war "by itself without the United Nations Security Council. It looks like an individual agenda." He said most of the nations in the coalition with the United States are small countries. The effort looks more like "the spirit of an empire" than democracy, he said.

He also fears the war sends a message to Muslims all over the world that the war is directed at them.

Members of the Islamic community fear hate crimes, and some have been reported in other states. None has been reported in West Virginia, he said.

"I hope no one will take advantage of this time to hurt Muslim families," he said.

After the war started, Daoudi read a BBC Web site that gave him information about early casualties. "In the car, I keep listening to the radio. At home, I keep watching television to follow the situation. We are just waiting," he said.

Daoudi conducts services at the center each Friday starting at 1:30 p.m. "We will be praying for healing," he said of today's service. He said they will also pray for wisdom and patience.

Historically, he said, the United States has offered the world the best example of "freedom and democracy, truth and real freedom. It looks like we are headed in an unknown direction."