RELIGION 11/16/2016 05:27 pm ET **Updated** Nov 17, 2016

Allies Form A Circle Of Protection Around Muslim Students Praying In Michigan

This is what solidarity looks like.



By Carol Kuruvilla



BENJI BEAR

A message scribbled in chalk expresses support for Muslims at the University of Michigan.

In outright defiance of the rising levels anti-Muslim hate in America, University of Michigan students joined forces on Monday to protect their own.

After hearing that a Muslim student had reportedly been threatened for her faith, hundreds of students and faculty showed up to stand guard around classmates who had gathered in a main square to perform one of Islam's five daily prayers.

The public *Ishaa* prayer, or nighttime prayer, was organized by the university's Muslim Student Association. Club president Farhan Ali, a junior, told The Huffington Post that members of his group wanted to show the campus that they were proud to be Muslim.

"Some individuals were afraid that we might be vulnerable during our prayer, so we had the idea of calling allies to support us and create a circle around us while we prayed and they ensured our safety," Ali told The Huffington Post in an email.

But Ali wasn't expecting such a strong and substantial turnout, from the Muslim community and from allies.

"Hundreds and hundreds of people came out for both prayer and showing their support," Ali wrote. "The amount of support was overwhelming and absolutely wonderful, and it brought some ease to the Muslim students [and] showed that we have other individuals who are willing to stand with us."



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Muslim students at the University of Michigan pray the Ishaa prayer on campus.

Mohammed Ishtiaq, the university's Muslim chaplain, told The Huffington Post that both the Jewish and Christian communities on campus came out to show their support. He said some members of the crowd held signs that read, "You Belong Here."

"Although it was a cold night, the amount of support we got was really heart warming," Ishtiaq said in an email. "Events of solidarity like this give us hope."



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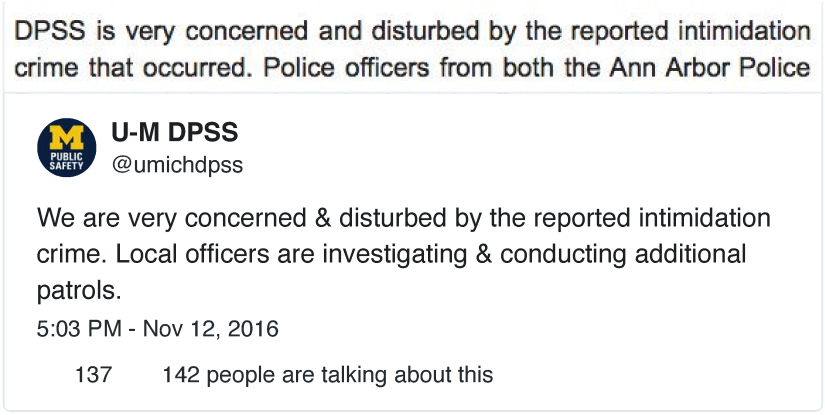
A supporter talks to the media during a solidarity event organized by Muslims at the University of Michigan.

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The group Ishaa prayer was organized in response to reports that a University of Michigan student had been harassed by a stranger for wearing a hijab. According to The Washington Post, the suspect reportedly approached the woman on Friday evening near the Ann Arbor campus and threatened to set her on fire if she didn't remove her hijab. Ann Arbor Police are investigating the incident.



Reports of harassment and intimidation of Muslims and other minorities have spiked in the days since the election of Donald Trump. During his campaign, the president-elect sparked controversy by suggesting that Muslims should be required to register in a database and suggesting a total ban on Muslims entering the United States. The ban later morphed into an “extreme vetting” of immigrants.



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The ishaa prayer is one of five daily prayers said by many Muslims as part of their faith.

Although Trump has largely stayed silent on his stance towards American Muslims since election night, some activists fear that Trump's victory could embolden those who are intent on spreading anti-Muslim hate.

Ali said that at the University of Michigan, there was some "sadness, fear, and uneasiness" in the Muslim community immediately after the election. But now, the group is trying to mobilize and organize.

“We must roll up our sleeves and get to work because the fight does not end with the election results,” Ali told HuffPost. “We have allies who are with us and we have a community that is resilient and will not succumb to fear in light of these attacks.”