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HEADLINE: Two Canadian Muslims Comment on the War on Terrorism

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BODY:

LaFLAMME: Well, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan comes to an end this weekend. And for most followers of the faith it's taken a very different feel this year in the wake of Sept. 11. To give us their thoughts: from Ottawa this morning we're joined by Hadeel Al-Shalchi, and in our studio, Irfan Syed, chair of the Muslim Lawyers' Association.

Good morning to both of you.

AL-SHALCHI: Good morning.

LaFLAMME: First of all, I want to ask you, I'm going to go to Hadeel in Ottawa. An Arab-American woman yesterday said things were just getting back to normal after Sept. 11, and then the Osama bin Laden tape was released.

AL-SHALCHI: Right. I think a good word to describe Ramadan, for example, for us right now is the word "heavy-hearted". It has been a sobering Ramadan for us. First we started off with the killing of innocent civilians on Sept. 11. And then we have to deal with an anti-Muslim backlash that took us by storm, really. The **Council** on American-**Islamic** Relations in Ottawa, for example, reported 150 serious hate crimes. And the police stations are saying there are more of them through. And then we had to deal with the bombing campaign in Afghanistan, especially since we share the faith of the people in Afghanistan. It's something that we did take personally. And then, as Canadians, we had to deal with Bill C-36 and the fact that it is speeding through Parliament. And then you have the Osama bin Laden tapes which, I mean I guess it's a little bit early to say if there will be a backlash because of it, but certainly I don't think it helps our situation.

LaFLAMME: Irfan, I'm going to ask you: Do you fear that those tapes will reinforce whatever anti-Muslim backlash had been experienced? And you followed them. You actually monitored those cases.

SYED: Well, we tried to. The reports came to us, people would

call us when there were incidents. I think to some extent there will be. But I think that is for some people who already had some very negative emotions and feelings, and this sort of helps reinforce that.

I think for other people it will inform the debate. And I think now Muslims have something to really grasp on, a piece of evidence that they can evaluate themselves. For example, the Arabic speakers can now listen to the tape themselves and decide for themselves. And you have to understand, about 80-85 percent of the Muslim world do not speak Arabic. So in fact they have to rely on others to translate and confirm for them that it's authentic.

LaFLAMME: But do you think the tapes, in watching them yourselves -- and I'll ask both of you this -- is going to convince more of the Arab world that this is about evil and not about Islam?

SYED: I think the Muslim world was convinced of that anyway. So that's not really the issue, about evil and Islam. The question was whether he in fact did it or whether this was a pretext for something else. And I think for the people who are always skeptical of what the US or other Western nations have to say, it won't change their minds. But for other people, more in the middle ground, will probably accept the American version of events.

LaFLAMME: Hadeel, do you want to comment on that?

AL-SHALCHI: Well, I have to agree with Irfan. All along we knew and that's what we were conveying to North Americans, at least, and to the world that Islam had nothing to do with this, that Muslims do not stand or agree with, and the faith does not agree with, people hijacking the faith and the rulings of Islam for personal agendas. But, as Irfan said, again, it's something that perhaps will make people's beliefs more concrete [overtalk] --

LaFLAMME: So what was it like for you, Hadeel, listening to that tape and the constant references to Allah, Islam?

AL-SHALCHI: Like I said, I don't agree with people hijacking the religion. It's something that is anti-Islamic. And it is something that does go against my belief. And so, obviously, it's something that, you know, makes me a little angry about it. But, like before we said, we haven't asked these people to do these things. And so, I think the message we're trying to get across is to remind people not to pin the crimes of just a few on the shoulders of a majority.

LaFLAMME: How are you in your own personal life able then to follow Ramadan, celebrate Ramadan, the tradition of Ramadan, under, as you say, the cloud of so many things that have unfolded?

AL-SHALCHI: I think that keeping with the tradition of Islam

also, the fact that we always try to strive and to struggle in the pleasure of God and trying to make ourselves -- you know, Ramadan is a time of self re-evaluation and trying to reflect on our past doings and what we would like to become as people. I think that this Ramadan has definitely made us stronger as a people, as individuals, as a community. And it's opened great doors for communications and dialogue not only within the Muslim people but also in the Canadian community at large.

LaFLAMME: I would like Irfan to jump in here, if I can, because I know that you went to Ottawa, you lobbied against Bill C-36. Do you agree that all of the events that have unfolded have opened the lines of communication?

SYED: To some extent. I mean, originally, much of the Muslim community was excluded. Much of the media, for example, didn't always have enough people in the community to go to as a resource to ask the questions. And the same things with politicians and law enforcement. Because often the community was a target of these investigations but not as part of participating. And I think that's what we have to do going forward, that here we are, we are part of this community, we want to be involved and be involved in the debate and also in the security of Canadians.

LaFLAMME: So there's a lot of work to do. And I'd like to thank both of you for joining us this morning with your thoughts.