



Photo by Jackson Stahl - Staff Photographer

Arsalan Iftikhar, a Muslim commentator who has appeared on National Public Radio and Fox News, challenged perceptions of Islam in a speech last Monday.

Muslim commentator fights Islamophobia in lecture

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A representative for Muslims across the United States and the world shared his experiences and concerns to students, faculty and members of the community at UNC Asheville.

"I always start my speeches with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. which says, 'We will have to repent in this generation not only for the actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people,'" said **Arsalan Iftikhar, international human rights lawyer and author.**

Iftikhar was just 24 years old when the attacks on Sept. 11 occurred. He knew he would have to represent his people.

"I knew the Muslim commu-

nity needed to issue clear commendations of the 9/11 attacks. I drafted up a one page editorial statement that I then emailed to every major newspaper in the country," Iftikhar said. "The next day they ran it."

After Sept. 11, America's view of the Islamic world transformed, Iftikhar said.

"As a professor before and after the 9/11 attacks, I noticed that after 9/11 there was a real interest in Islam, simply because people felt they didn't know enough about it," said **Rodger Payne, chair of the religious studies department.**

This feeling led to what Iftikhar and many others refer to as Islamophobia.

"It can be defined loosely as both the inward and outward scorn and confusion by people

misinformed about what Islam truly teaches," said **Fatimia Faridi, a sophomore chemistry student and vice president of the Muslim Student Association at UNCA.**

Iftikhar gave multiple situations where political figures and the media in the United States misinformed the public.

"You can only imagine that this level of anti-Muslim rhetoric coming from some of the highest levels of our political and media circles would ultimately translate into hate crimes against Muslims, Arabs, south Asians and those perceived to be," said Iftikhar.

This has led to a stereotype of Muslim people in the United States.

"The problem with this stereotype is to take on very

misrepresentative image of a person who practices a certain religion and reading that on the whole of a religion," Payne said. "It's a very false expansion of that image."

Faridi lived in New York City at the time of the attacks. She said she experienced the stereotype first hand.

"I saw friends and family being mistreated and shunned because they were now suddenly the enemy," Faridi said. "Previously contributing community members were the same people being looked at with a heightened sense of alarm and in many cases hatred."

Katie Rosenberg, a sophomore international studies student, attended the event. She said education and communication are the best ways

to eliminate common Muslim stereotypes.

"A lot of American just has the wrong picture of what a Muslim person is like. It's like people are almost afraid to talk to people about it," said Rosenberg.

Iftikhar said steps have been taken since Sept. 11 to ease tension in the Muslim community.

"Several high profile statements led by the United Nations and their newly created Alliance of Civilizations project, called for reconciliations between people of all different faiths and to use the tragedy of 9/11 to ensure that we live in a world where we focus on each others' commonalities instead

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