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Muslims cite increased woes

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—A Muslim-American civil-rights group has released a report claiming “evangelical leaders and neo-conservatives” contributed to a 15 percent increase in reports of anti-Muslim incidents in 2002.

The report, conducted annually by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, compiled what the agency called “credible reports” of anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment and action in the United States during 2002.

It also catalogued what the group considered public incidents of anti-Muslim bias, blaming Religious Right figures like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and former Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines, among others, for inciting anti-Islamic actions with their statements.

“Calling this report 'Guilt by Association' is appropriate,” said Nihad Awad, the council's executive director. “Tens of thousands of people have been impacted in a negative way.”

From January to December of 2002, 602 incidents of anti-Muslim discrimination were reported. That represents a 15 percent increase over the 525 incidents in the previous reporting period. Researchers also said reports of violent physical attacks on Muslims increased by 8 percent in

2002.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations changed its reporting period this year from the previous period, which ran from March 15, 2001 to March 14, 2002—meaning incidents from Jan. 1 to March 14, 2002, were counted twice. But Mohamed Nimer, CAIR's research director, said that either way, the number of incidents in a one-year reporting period increased significantly.

Since CAIR first started compiling such statistics in 1995, reports of anti-Muslim discrimination and bias have increased more than seven-fold.

The report also contains harsh criticisms of the federal government, particularly singling out post-Sept. 11 U.S. policies. It says such policies as the USA Patriot Act of 2001 allow the executive branch to get around the Fourth Amendment's requirement of probable cause when conducting police searches.

Religious Right figures who have spoken negatively about Islam previously have responded to critics of their comments by saying they are merely preaching the truth of the Bible.

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