

Muslims condemn savage attack on British soldier

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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LONDON (RNS) Leaders of Britain's 2.8 million Muslims reacted with horror and anger following Wednesday's (May 22) slaughter with knives and machetes of an off-duty British soldier in the streets outside the Royal Artillery Barracks in south London.

A statement from the Muslim Council of Britain condemned the slaughter of the soldier by two men – both believed to be Christian converts to Islam – as “a barbaric act that has no basis in Islam and which we condemn unreservedly.”

Abdullah al Andalusi, a spokesman for the Muslim Debate Initiative, which brings together Islamic scholars and researchers in the U.K., said: “These people claimed they killed the soldier in the name of protecting others from UK foreign policy. But if what they claim is true, they have acted no differently from the crimes they claim they wish to see stopped.”

The slain soldier was identified Thursday as 25-year-old Drummer Lee Rigby of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

Every major British newspaper carried graphic photos of one of the suspects, identified as 28-year old Michael Adebolajo, waving a butcher's cleaver, his hands soaked in blood, following the attack.

Media reports indicate his Nigerian-born parents moved him to London at age 15 to get him away from Islamic fundamentalists; a report in Thursday's London Evening Standard said that he had been raised as a Christian but had converted to Islam.

“They have done a cowardly, barbaric act,” said Imam Ajmal Masroor of the Islamic Society of Britain. “They have insulted God and Islam. They are low vile scum. We, the British, will remain together resolute and strong.”

Prime Minister David Cameron, who cut short a visit to Paris when he heard the news of the horrendous slaughter, said the nation remains “resolute” in the face of the attacks but also tried to prevent a backlash of anti-Muslim violence that has already resulted in attacks on at least two mosques.

“We will never give in to terrorism in any of its forms,” he said. “This was not just an attack on Britain and on the British way of life. It was also a betrayal of Islam and of the Muslim communities who give so much to this country. There is nothing in Islam that justified this dreadful act.”

A prominent Muslim in the city of Leicester told Religion News Service that he and his community are “extremely worried” about right-wing reaction to the slaughter in London.

“This could fuel the anger of organizations like the English Defence League and the British National Party,” he said, requesting anonymity because he feared for his safety. “The EDL last night had over 250 of its supporters wearing white balaclavas near the scene of the murder. They were shouting anti-Islamic slogans.”

EDL leader Tommy Robinson told reporters: “They’ve cut off one of our army’s (soldier’s) heads in the streets of London. Our next generation are being taught in schools that Islam is a religion of peace. It never has been. What you saw today is Islam.”