

# Muslims and supporters protest congressional hearings

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NEW YORK (RNS) When Anam Chaudhry, 17, sang the national anthem to several hundred protesters in Times Square on Sunday afternoon, she wore a Muslim headscarf, and around her shoulders, another garment: the American flag.

"We love this country," said Imam Shamsi Ali, head of the Islamic Cultural Center here, after Chaudhry opened the interfaith rally. "We want to see America remain the most powerful and most beautiful country in the world."

Faith leaders and supporters braved the rain on Sunday to protest the upcoming congressional hearings on homegrown Islamic terrorism planned for this Thursday (March 10).

Protesters held signs and wore t-shirts bearing the rally's slogan, "Today, I am Muslim, too," while others said it was unjust to single out a religious group as a threat to national security.

As the rally wore on, another slogan took shape in the speeches and protests. It was a cry for inclusion, an expression of patriotism: "I am American, too."

"People say Islam is the enemy," said rally organizer Imam Feisal

Abdul Rauf, who is also a co-founder of a controversial project to build a mosque near Ground Zero. "The real enemy is radicalization and extremism, and we, as Americans, are against it."

Some faith leaders have encouraged Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., who, as chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security, has spearheaded the hearings, to widen its scope to include other threats to national security.

"That's absolute nonsense," King told The New York Times on Sunday. "The threat is coming from the Muslim community, the radicalization attempts are directed at the Muslim community. Why should I investigate other communities?"

Leaders at the rally expressed a desire to help fight against the threat of terrorism.

"The threats to our country are too big to disqualify any person who 'loves freedom' -- as (former President George W.) Bush would say -- from lending a hand," said the Rev. Chloe Breyer, an Episcopal priest.

Some protesters said they saw the hearings as a kind of hazing period for Muslims in America.

Protesters from an array of countries waved American flags, but not everyone at the rally shared in the patriotic fever.

"I don't like this country," said Muhammad Rashwan, 27, who moved to New York from Egypt two years ago. "The press is unfair to the Middle East, and people act like the words of the press come from God."

Four blocks south of the rally, 50 people gathered in a counter-protest, but disbanded early on as the rain fell.