

Bus ads aim to reclaim the meaning of 'jihad'

by [Doug Stanglin](#)

January 10, 2013

An ad campaign on San Francisco buses is aimed at trying to change public perception of the word "jihad," which the program's founder says has been distorted by extremists - Muslim and anti-Muslim alike.

Ahmed Rehab, a 36-year-old political activist, started the campaign in Chicago in December and expanded it to 25 San Francisco buses at the start of the year.

Rehab, who heads the Chicago office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, says his MyJihad campaign, which defines jihad as a personal struggle in many areas of life, is aimed at reframing a debate over a word that has become synonymous in many quarters with armed struggle and terrorism.

He said the debate has been taken over "more or less by two extremes - Muslim extremists and anti-Muslim extremists."

The voices of moderate Muslims in the mainstream, he said, are "either drowned out or diluted."

The MyJihad ads, featuring attractive young men and women and plastered on the side of city buses, include slogans such as "My Jihad is to build friendships across the aisle. What's yours?" and "My Jihad is to stay fit despite my busy schedule. What's yours?"

The campaign has its own website, Twitter offering and Facebook page. Similar campaigns are planned for the East Coast and South, Rehab said.

Merriam-Webster defines "jihad" as: "A holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty; also: a personal struggle in devotion to Islam especially involving spiritual discipline; a crusade for a principle or belief."

"The intention of the campaign is to educate our fellow Americans about what the word jihad means," Zahra Billoo, the executive director of the Bay Area office for CAIR told KGO-TV. "A common misconception of the word jihad is that it means armed struggle or holy war, and that is something that has been perpetrated by many who've made careers out of pushing anti-Muslim sentiment."

Rehab said the project comes in response to a campaign first mounted in New York City subways by conservative blogger Pamela Geller that includes such ads as: "In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat jihad."

According to KQED, the San Francisco transport system, called Muni, began running the Geller ads after a federal judge ruled that New York City had accepted them on public transit there.

Muni later posted its own ads on the same buses explaining that Muni disavowed the Geller message, KQED reported.

Geller, meanwhile, plans another round of ads in New York City subways, according to CBS New York.

"A new anti-Israel campaign is currently running, which virtually everybody ignores," she said. "But if you speak against jihad, or you take a pro-Israel stance, everybody seems to be outraged."