

**MPR News | Minnesota Now After public service award over response to ICE surge, Twin Cities imam says there's more work left to do 01KT26WBF42AF8GZ2HAZY7R72R**

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**NINA MOINI:** Four Twin Cities organizers have received the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award on behalf of their communities. The JFK Library Foundation presents the annual award to elected officials and others who have shown courageous leadership. This year, the award committee recognized the people of the Twin Cities for the response to the surge of federal immigration agents this winter. Caroline Kennedy presented the award at a ceremony in Boston last night.

**CAROLINE KENNEDY:** Across racial, religious, and political lines, across business and labor, volunteers mobilized to protest peacefully, document violent overreach, build rapid response networks, provide food and clothing to immigrant neighbors, and so much more. Joining Chicago, Portland, and other communities, their compassion and unwavering commitment to the ideals that sustain our democracy inspired communities across this country and forced the federal government to back down.

Imam Yusuf Abdulle was one of the Minnesotans there to accept the award. He's executive director of the Islamic Association of North America and cofounder of the Somali American Leadership Table. He joins me now still from Boston. Thanks so much for your time this afternoon, imam.

**YUSUF** Thank you so much.

**ABDULLE:**

**NINA MOINI:** As you listen to the words there from Caroline Kennedy, daughter of JFK, describing what this award means, does it take you back to those moments last night and what were you feeling in those moments?

**YUSUF** Yeah. This award reminds us the people of Minnesota, the struggle of the people of Minnesota during ICE surge  
**ABDULLE:** and how people were united to face the difficult that was created by the government. And I didn't actually expect this will reach to this level. And actually, it was an amazing night with an amazing people, and also, a recognition of the struggle of the people of Minnesota.

**NINA MOINI:** What was the reception that you all received as Minnesotans from others? Did people want to meet all of you and learn about what it was like here?

**YUSUF** It was a warm reception. Basically, we were the heroes of the night. We were the heroes of the night for the  
**ABDULLE:** people of Minnesota. And many people attended, faces that I used to see on the TV and that I never met before were there. And people felt that the resistance to injustice and oppression in the country was represented by Minnesota. So the room was very warm and standing ovation that continued for minutes. It was really an amazing, amazing night.

**NINA MOINI:** And part of the reason that you were there is because you cofounded the Somali American Leadership Table, or SALT. And this was in response to President Donald Trump's threats targeting Somali Minnesotans and the surge of federal agents that were here. Tell me about how that work looked during the height of the surge and how that work is going now.

**YUSUF** When ICE surge started, President Trump sent 3,000 people to the state of Minnesota, especially the Twin Cities.  
**ABDULLE:** People run to the faith centers, to imams, scholars, to community leaders. And something that would have taken for a long, long time to organize came in few days together. We came together, put our heads together, and led by the community leaders, imams and faith leaders, and from all other organizations, we created a table.

The name was concocted by one of our cochairs, Abdulahi Farah, and we actually made two cochairs, Abdulahi Farah and Abdirahman Abdulle, who led this effort with others and other organizations to make sure that we galvanize the support of the community and also connect with the wider community of Minnesota, faith leaders, other community leaders, other organizations. So it was an amazing time. And as it was a difficult time, it was also a very hopeful time to come together and it actually brought us together as our struggle became one.

**NINA MOINI:** And to your point, receiving this award doesn't necessarily mean the end of any of this work. Your work continues. How have the connections that were even further deepened during the height of the surge, how is that continuing to grow as you look forward with your work?

**YUSUF ABDULLE:** It continues more because neighbors know more about each other now, coworkers know about each other more now, organizations as well. We're more connected than before. And yes, challenges are still there. ICE did not leave and they left just the streets, but they are still sending letters to immigrants to come to the courts, administrative courts, and then people are still being prosecuted to take them out of the country and to deport them. So that struggle still continues.

Also, the attacks on the Somali community specifically by the government is still continuous. And that is the struggle is still ongoing. But the coalitions that we built and the connections that we made are really working well, and hopefully that will continue. And we're building those bridges that hopefully as it brought Somali and other communities together, this will continue to be successful. And operation is for the community to make sure that we stay together. We live together and we work together.

**NINA MOINI:** And just lastly, imam, this was a recognition on a national and international scale, but here at home in Minnesota, as your work continues, what would you like to see from state, local, federal leaders to help with some of the aftermath and some of the ripple effects of what happened this winter as it relates to people's finances, feelings of safety, feelings of having due process, and things like that?

**YUSUF ABDULLE:** That is an amazing question. The elected officials and those who are seeking office have responsibility to take care of the people, and taking care of the people means when people are in difficulties to show up. Come to any place and anywhere that the community needs for them to be. And number two, to speak up, which means also to speak up in a way to defending the community from any rhetoric.

One of the things that we're facing nowadays, especially the Somali community, is that there is a continuous rhetoric of hatred and discrimination and belittling the Somali community, especially from the highest office. That cannot continue. That should not be accepted. That should not be condoned.

And our elected officials, whether federal or state, need to speak up and not to normalize. And this thing not to be desensitized that it becomes normal to target an entire community and label them, that is unacceptable. And we want our officials to come out and speak about that forcefully, and to work with the people of Minnesota and to work on the unity as well.

**NINA MOINI:** Imam Abdulle, thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

**YUSUF ABDULLE:** Thank you so much, and have a good day.

**NINA MOINI:** Imam Yusuf Abdulle leads the Islamic Association of North America, and cofounded the Somali American Leadership Table in response to the federal surge.