

[THEME MUSIC]

CATHERINE RICHERT: This is *Minnesota Now*. I'm Catherine Richert, filling in for Nina Moini. Somali-American and Muslim community members in Minnesota are raising concerns about safety and Islamophobia after President Donald Trump posted a video showing children at a St. Paul kindergarten graduation ceremony. It included several young girls wearing hijabs, and its caption was from an account called End Wokeness. It said, quote, "Public school in St. Paul, Minnesota. Every girl is in a hijab in kindergarten."

This morning, Somali community leaders gathered for a press conference to condemn the post. Joining me now is one of those leaders. Imam Yusuf Abdulle is Executive Director of the Islamic Association of North America. Thank you so much for joining us.

YUSUF ABDULLE: Thank you so much.

CATHERINE RICHERT: What is your--

YUSUF ABDULLE: [INAUDIBLE]

CATHERINE RICHERT: Yeah, absolutely. What was your message at the press conference this morning?

YUSUF ABDULLE: Our message was to reject this type of behavior, and from the highest level of the United States government, which talks about children in a negative way. That is basically going very low and at a level that we have never reached, to talk about children in that way. So our message was to reject that categorically and call American people to reject such things.

CATHERINE RICHERT: This is not the first time the president has singled out the Somali community. What was your reaction to this post this time around?

YUSUF ABDULLE: This was the lowest of the low, which is going to kindergarteners and talking about them in that way and showing that they don't belong and shaming them because of their hijab, and their families as well. So people, unfortunately, are used to, the Somali community, to be dehumanized and demonized. And we should not be used to that, where everyone should reject that. So this was the low of the lowest, as I said. And we have to talk about it, and we have to reject that. And we call on all American people to reject.

It's children, for god's sake. We're talking here about children. We're not talking about politicians. We're not talking about issues, political issues. And there is none like that. It is children singing, graduating, kindergartners. When we get to that level, we lose our morality and who we are. And we're calling American people to check on that and to reject that categorically. If it comes to one family in that way, it will come to other families as well.

CATHERINE RICHERT: Yeah. This gets at a bigger point here. Like I mentioned, this isn't the first time the Somali community has been targeted by the president. Just to lay it out here for the audience, it started last year when President Trump called the Somali people garbage. It hasn't been limited to Trump's rhetoric, either. Two weeks ago, Republican Minnesota Congressman Tom Emmer said Somali people should assimilate or, quote, "go the hell back to where they came from." How does it affect your community to be constantly targeted by these very high-profile politicians?

YUSUF ABDULLE: It is affecting this community immensely. It is affecting this community psychologically, emotionally. And it is telling this community time and again they don't belong here. And it has been-- this community has been used as a scapegoat. The country is facing difficulties, economic difficulties. Many people are not able to feed their children, and their wages are not enough. The cost of living is getting higher and higher.

Instead of talking about that, the president and his followers, including Tom Emmer, unfortunately, who has a large constituency of Somali community in his area, including St. Cloud, all the way up to Blaine and that area, to say these things, "go hell out of here," for people who voted for him, for people who were part of his constituents and his area, and for the president of the United-- only to basically appease and please the president's direction. This is very unfortunate. Our community is hurt, is affected by this.

But we're resilient, and we appreciate the people of Minnesota who stood with all of us and who are standing with the immigrant community. So it is not over. The political climate will change. Things will change. People will come back to their senses. But we're going through very tough times as of now.

CATHERINE RICHERT: You mentioned the community being resilient. What are you hearing from community members right now about this incident? Have any of them experienced any threats so far?

YUSUF ABDULLE: Well, the threat level, it's not reported enough. The threats that we receive, our community receives, is endless. And the rhetoric and hate, online hate specifically, is exponential. But the resilience of community comes from the faith of the community. This is a community of faith, and this is a community that belongs here.

58% of Somalis were born here. And closer to 90%, even, if not more, are either legal residents or citizens of the United States. So yes, we stay here. We're not going anywhere. We'll fight back, and hopefully this community will get out of this tough time stronger and more resilient, with part and parcel of the Minnesota community. And we're grateful to be Minnesotans.

CATHERINE RICHERT: And you've said a few times now that you would like for the Minnesota community to condemn posts like this, rhetoric like this. What else do you want non-Somali people to take away from this incident?

YUSUF ABDULLE: We want our neighbors, as they stood with us at the time of ICE search, to stand with us throughout the way because our future, our destination, is the same. And the president is talking about children. Come on. Children! If someone comes to my children, to my child, that person will come to your child as well.

We have common things. We are neighbors. We work together. So we want the people of Minnesota to stand together. Whether this hate is towards the Somali community, or Hmong community, or Latino community, or African-American community, or any other community, we should stand together to make sure that we're safe together, and we work together, and we live together, and we are all Minnesotans. So I would like to call all people of Minnesota, Minnesotans, to reject hate and division.

**CATHERINE
RICHERT:**

Thank you so much. That was Imam Yusuf Abdulle. He's the executive director of the Islamic Association of North America.

**YUSUF
ABDULLE:**

Thank you so much and have a good day.