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## 'Flying While Muslim'

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Shahin and the North American Imams Federation say they've consulted their lawyer, and have called for a boycott of U.S. Airways. They're also being backed by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Washington-based advocacy group that has demanded U.S. Airways launch an immediate investigation (which the airline says it has done) and has called on the U.S. Department of Justice and the Transportation Security Administration to conduct separate investigations of the incident. (CAIR says it has received a letter from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties saying that it has opened a review of the case.) "Since 9-11, we've seen a great number of racial and religious ethnic profiling resulting in people being taken off airplanes summarily because they are Muslim," said CAIR Legal Director Arsalan Iftikhar, who says the Imam case is another example of "flying while Muslim." "Reactions like this to Muslims praying really strike at the heart of the fear and prejudice that's still so prevalent in this country."

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This is at least the second time this year that U.S. Airways has removed a Muslim from a plane. In August, Rima Qayyum, a 28-year-old substitute teacher, was taken off a flight and detained for 14 hours at West Virginia's Tri-State Airport when security officials reportedly mistook her facewash and bottled water for possible

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bomb-making ingredients. Nationwide, according to CAIR's latest civil rights report, for 2005, complaints of anti-Muslim harassment, violence and discrimination have gone up 30 percent since the year prior. Additionally, for the second year in a row, the 1,972 reports received in 2005 mark the highest number of Muslim civil rights complaints ever reported to CAIR in its 12-year history.

Observant American Muslims—who must pray five times daily—are left with a dilemma. How do they maintain their religious faith without attracting attention in an environment of heightened fear? Some ask why they should be expected to change their behavior in a country that promises religious freedom. Amine Chigani, a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech, raises some of these questions—and more—in a Wednesday e-mail to CAIR: “Is there anything that I should do so I won't have the same experience as our imams did?” she writes. “I mean, should I ask the plane crew while I get seated that I will need to pray at a certain time, or should I tell them during check in? Should I explain to the passenger next to me that I will be praying? And if the worst happens and they ask me to leave, should I? ... I am willing to do anything to avoid [causing problems], except not to pray. Please advise!” Chigani is traveling to Seattle in December.

Patrick Hogan, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Airports Commission, which owns and operates the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, says that everyone should have a right to pray, but that in this day and age, “people must be sensitive to how their actions might impact those around them.”

But Shahin says his group took every precaution possible. “That's my question to the people,” Shahin says. “What more do I have to do? I am American, I speak this language, I do everything by the book and I'm still suspicious. I cannot change the color of my skin.”

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