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Friday, Jul. 11, 2008

Big mosque on the Prairie opens in Calgary

Source: CBC News
Posted: 07/05/08 11:50AM
Filed Under: Canada

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion and Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier will be attending a banquet Saturday celebrating the opening of the biggest mosque ever built in Canada.

The \$15-million Baitan Nur mosque in northeast Calgary covers 4,500 square metres, or 48,000 square feet, and was constructed largely through donations from the city's small but rapidly growing Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

The Ahmadiyya movement of Islam was founded 100 years ago, originating with the teachings of Indian villager Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and is renowned today for promoting a peaceful coexistence with people of all faiths and cultures.

Members of the community say the stunning architectural landmark will serve as a symbol of peace.

"We are inviting people of other religions to come to us and talk," spokesman Safeer Kahn said during a media tour on Friday.

"We don't want to isolate ourselves. We want other people to come and tell us about their teachings and their [religious] scripts ... and they will listen to our positive views," he told CBC News on Saturday.

The mosque is a sprawling but spartan building, designed to allow women and men to worship equally.

"Whatever is available to men is available to women," Kahn told reporters.

"In this hall, we made many skylights," he pointed out during the tour. "The name of mosque is Baitun Nur, which means house of divine light."

A few hundred people from the city's Ahmadiyya Muslim community of roughly 1,500 raised \$8 million dollars for the mosque's construction.

One of the contributors, taxi driver Ijaz Ahmad, said he sold his house and moved his family into a basement apartment in order to donate \$100,000.

"Children broke their piggy banks, people sold their houses, they donated the money and moved to basements, some people obtained second mortgages," Khan said at Friday's dedication ceremony.

His Holiness Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, spiritual head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community, delivered the opening sermon, broadcast Friday to 170 countries via Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA) satellite service.

He said such mosques should not only enhance the local landscape but promote mutual peace, love and harmony in society.

Worshippers gather for prayers Friday inside the mosque.
(CBC)
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