

Politicians and faithful open Canada's largest mosque

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CALGARY - Canada's largest mosque was officially dedicated Saturday by an estimated crowd of 5,000 people that included religious leaders, Canada's two top politicians and throngs of faithful.

A steady stream of worshippers walked underneath the Baitun Nur mosque's shining steel dome and minaret tower and flowed to large white tents to witness the unveiling. The mosque, which covers 4,300 square metres is the spiritual home of Calgary's Ahmadiyya Muslim community, which numbers between 2,000 and 3,000.

The global spiritual leader of the Ahmadi Muslims, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, arrived in Calgary last Wednesday to lead the first prayers in the new facility and was on hand Saturday for the building's public celebration.



CREDIT: Greg Fulmes for Calgary Herald
Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Admad at the grand opening of the new Baitun Nur Mosque in northeast Calgary July 5, 2008.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper told the crowd that the Ahmadiyya Muslim community knows the importance of tolerance and peace because it has been the target of persecution itself since its founding in the late 19th century.

"In this mosque, we see the love and benevolent faith of Islam," Harper said. "Ahmadis embrace Canada and Canada has embraced you."

Opposition Leader Stephane Dion said the success of the Ahmadi community in Canada, as captured by the sacrifices made to build the Calgary mosque, is at the essence of what makes the country great.

"Canada will show the world that Muslim communities can flourish in a secular state like ours," Dion added.

He praised the Ahmadiyya community for teaching its followers that loyalty to their new homeland of Canada is an integral part of their faith.

Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier reminded the crowd of the cold, rainy June day in 2005 when the mosque's cornerstone was laid.

"What we see today is a testament to your faith and commitment to the community. Your mosque is a proud new landmark on Calgary's skyline," the mayor said.

Roman Catholic Bishop Fred Henry said Calgary Muslims and Christians share a common spiritual journey in their worship of God.

"My Muslim brothers and sisters, we also have a common concern for promoting moral values and addressing ethical concerns in our city through our ongoing dialogue and our work together," said Henry.

For members of the local Ahmadiyya community, it was a day of unbridled pride.

"I hardly slept at all last night," said Dr. Safeer Khan. "Our hearts are full of love for Canada.

"The first night we were in the mosque for prayers, I looked around and I couldn't really believe that we did this."

The mosque also houses classrooms, office space, a children's area, a kitchen and a community centre.

The community's financial sacrifices have been remarkable. Homes have been remortgaged or sold, women have contributed treasured jewelry and children have broken into their piggy banks to help pay the bills.

With carpenters and painters wrapping up their work, Ahmadiyya volunteers moved into the mosque last week. One group worked around the clock for four days to assemble the thousands of small pieces of a massive, 400-kilogram chandelier now hanging within the dome above the prayer hall.

Others with electronics expertise are completing wiring for the mosque's state-of-the-art audio-visual systems.

"The fact that this is being broadcast all over the world is a huge source of pride," said 17-year-old Ramzah Khan.

"I saw people in tears. I think people are honoured to have this in Calgary."

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With files from Sherri Zickefoose

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