



Islamic school apologizes but Jewish group says they need to do more

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TORONTO - Jewish community leaders say an apology from an east-Toronto Islamic school which taught Jews are “treacherous” and “crafty” is a good start, but not nearly enough.

Avi Benlolo, president of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre of Toronto, said Tuesday that East End Madrassah (EEM), which teaches courses on Sundays from rented space at an east-end public school, should open its doors to the Jewish community and Ontario’s Ministry of Education so the groups can oversee the reworking of its teaching curriculum.

Benlolo’s reaction came several hours after the EEM school issued a statement apologizing to the Jewish community for a lesson in its curriculum that was teaching young Muslim students that Jews are “crafty,” “treacherous,” comparable to Nazis and allegedly plotted to kill the Prophet Mohammed. According to the apology, the inclusion of the offending content in the curriculum was “unintentional.”

Links on the EEM website to its lesson plans have since been disabled, and the York Regional Police Hate Crimes unit is investigating following a complaint filed by Benlolo last Thursday.

The chief Imam of the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto, the EEM school’s parent organization, said late Tuesday that the offensive content came from information

taken from two websites without the permission of the “scholars” designing the school’s lesson plans.

“There has been a lack of scrutiny and communication between the people who update the curriculum,” said Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi. “When we express our (religious) differences, it has to be done in a civilized way ... (and) this was unacceptable.”

Rizvi could not immediately say what websites the offensive language came from, and refused to identify who at the EEM was responsible for adding it to the school’s lesson plan, adding only that he’ll let the police investigation take its course.

As for Benlolo’s call for the EEM to allow Jewish and government officials to oversee the redesign of the school’s curriculum, Rizvi said that will not be happening.

“I don’t think any group can ask to go and run other institutions,” he said from the organization’s headquarters in Thornhill.

When contacted at her home Tuesday morning, the school’s principal, Masuma Jessa, would not comment on how the offensive material made it into her school’s curriculum.

Premier Dalton McGuinty said he was pleased that police are looking into the matter and added “there’s no room for hatred or intolerance” in Ontario.