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# IWU students, staff rally against hate crimes

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Dayo Ajayi, 14, a freshman at Normal Community High School, and her father, Ky Ajayi, a political science professor who teaches at both Illinois Wesleyan University and Illinois State University, talk with Devaki Soman, a senior at IWU, as they turned out for a public show of solidarity against hate crimes, Tuesday, March 27, 2012, at IWU. The event included speakers who presented their perspectives on hate crimes. (The Pantagraph/David Proeber)

BLOOMINGTON — A mostly somber crowd of close to 200 people gathered over the noon hour Tuesday on the Illinois Wesleyan University quad wearing hijabs and hooded sweatshirts in a rally against hate crimes.

The rally and the attire were inspired by the recent deaths of an Iraqi-born American woman, Shaima Alawad, who regularly wore the traditional Muslim headscarf and was beaten to death in suburban San Diego, and Trayvon Martin, an unarmed, young black man who was shot to death about a month ago while walking to a relative's house in Florida while wearing a hooded sweatshirt.

Alawad's death is being investigated as a possible hate crime. The 32-year-old mother of five died Saturday, three days after being found unconscious in her home. Nearby was a threatening note that reportedly said, "Go back to your country."

Martin's death has been described as a matter of racial profiling and remains under investigation. A neighborhood watch volunteer shot him during a confrontation after the volunteer reported a "suspicious" person.

Tuesday's crowd was filled with students, faculty and staff of many races. Several students and staff spoke.

University Chaplain Elyse Nelson Winger told the crowd, "I am wearing this hijab because beneath every hijab or hoodie is a person ... always worthy of equality and freedom."

Raven Stubbs, president of the Black Student Union, made impassioned remarks about reality versus hiding flaws as individuals and a nation. "We have to stop covering up our shortcomings" and face them, said Stubbs, a junior from Detroit who wore a black hooded sweatshirt over a blue hijab.

She said the death of Martin reminded her of the death of Emmett Till, a black Chicago teenager slain in Mississippi in 1955 after reportedly whistling at a woman.

For IWU professor Narendra Jaggi, the killing brought to mind the death of Amadou Diallo, a black man who was killed in a hail of 41 bullets by New York police in 1999.

“Just as the wounds of Amadou’s death were healing, then came Trayvon,” said Jaggi, who organized the event, creating a Facebook page barely 29 hours before the rally took place.

With the death of Alawad, Jaggi said, “It occurred to me ... that something needed to be said now.”

Chelsea Davitt, a sophomore from Bloomington, said she and her classmates were shocked by the killings of Alawad and Martin. “It’s 2012,” she said. “This shouldn’t be happening anymore.”

As part of the rally, Stefan Riley and Jordan Pettis sang Sam Cooke’s civil rights anthem, “A Change is Gonna Come,” and inspired rhythmic clapping to Marvin Gaye’s, “What’s Going On.”

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