

AL Arabiya, "U.S. Islamic Center says it was singled out in controversial court ruling" (6.12.12)

An Islamic center in Tennessee slammed a U.S. court ruling that annulled its government-issued construction permit as unjustified and motivated by a sense of Islamophobia.

Rutherford County Chancellor Robert Corlew ruled on May 29 that there was not "adequate public notice" of a government meeting that approved the construction of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro.

"It is with great sadness we received the recent ruling of Chancellor Robert E. Corlew," the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro said in a statement posted on its website.

"We do not believe that singling out ICM permit and hiding behind 'providing adequate public notice' is justified," the statement added.

"Our small community has been the subject of intimidations, bullying, false accusations, vandalisms, arson, bomb threats, and lawsuits yet we are always hopeful that the coming days will be better than those past."

The court ruled that Rutherford County officials violated the state's Sunshine Law that requires regulatory authorities' meetings to be made available to the public.

Opponents of the 52,000-square-foot mosque seeking to stop its construction had claimed in the court that Islam was not a legitimate religion and did not deserve the First Amendment protection. They also claimed that the individuals behind the mosque's construction were part of a "secret" group that seeks to "overthrow" the U.S. Constitution, according to a report by the Associated Press.

But Judge Corlew dismissed those complaints and ruled only on the basis of the "public notice" requirement.

“My perspective on it [is that] it was not an open meetings issue,” Kent Flanagan, director of the nonprofit Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, a nonprofit advocacy group, told The Associated Press. “If a Christian church has asked to build a new building for their congregation and put out similar notice, no one would have thought anything of it.”

The statement from the Islamic center said it was singled out by the court “just because of our faith, in a clear violation to our constitutional rights.”

“ICM has applied for and obtained the above noted permit based on all applicable federal, state, and county laws. ICM has submitted its application according to the existing rules of law and was approved accordingly.”

The court ruling does not order the suspension of construction at the mosque.

“Unfortunately, in this decision [Corlew] stated that the plaintiffs’ attorneys could file a mandamus to stop the construction of the mosque,” Laurie Cardoza-Moore, president of Nashville-based Proclaiming Justice to the Nations, a groups which claims teaching “biblical responsibilities” and promoting action against “new anti-Semitism,” told OneNewsNow.

Cardoza-Moore acts as a spokesperson for the plaintiffs.

“The judge could have ordered it to be stopped. Really, the judge’s decision should be enough to stop it. But unfortunately the mosque is going forward. It’s very disconcerting. It almost appears that this is a legal stall tactic to drag out the process.”

Cardoza-Moore added that her group is now racing to obtain a court order to stop the construction of the mosque.

Frank Gibson, the public policy director of the Tennessee Press Association, told the Associated Press that there was a sign on the mosque property for a month announcing future construction plans and that at one point the sign was “defaced.”