

## '... I will kill Canadians' Father of slain Afghan kids threatens revenge

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Canwest News Service

Thursday, July 31, 2008

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - The father of two children accidentally killed by Canadian soldiers says he wants revenge.

"If I get a chance, I will kill Canadians," Rozi Muhammed said Thursday.

It's not clear if Muhammed is serious or merely venting his anger. His threat is made with no emotion, but his voice betrays a deep exhaustion and profound shock.

He is haggard, his eyes are glazed. He has had almost no sleep since the nightmare incident Sunday when his children's bodies exploded from the impact of a single shot from a Canadian 25-millimetre cannon.

"I was knocked unconscious," said Muhammed, speaking through an interpreter with Global National in Kandahar City.

"When I woke up, the Canadians came and gave us some treatment. After that, I collected some of the pieces of the children. My wife was crying, she was in a very bad way."

The incident has a terrible irony for Muhammed. He and his wife were taking their two children away from their home in Panjwai district in the hope of escaping the escalating violence that has plagued the rural areas.

It was dusk and they were on their way by taxi to a new life in Kandahar City 40 kilometres away when they encountered a Canadian military convoy heading towards them. For reasons that might never be understood, the taxi driver failed to obey well-publicized signals from soldiers to pull over and stay clear of the convoy.

Soldiers say the driver sped towards them without stopping. Rozi Muhammed said the driver at first pulled over but inexplicably drove back onto the highway after two armoured vehicles had passed when more were on the way.

Fearing a suicide attack, a gunner opened fire with the powerful cannon that can slice through steel. The single 25-millimetre bullet ripped through the car and instantly killed Muhammed's children: five-year-old daughter, Mulkia, and two-year-old son, Thorjan. Shrapnel from the large calibre projectile also wounded Muhammed who was taken to hospital.

When asked what he wants to happen now, Muhammed twice said he wants to "kill Canadians."



CREDIT: Graham Thomson/Edmonton Journal

A sign on a Canadian armoured vehicle warns local drivers to stay clear, the placards are attached to the front and back of vehicles. Advertisements run regularly in local news media to remind civilians to pull over when a convoy approaches.

However, after a few moments, he added: "I am a poor man, they should help me."

Canadian officials say they have talked to Muhammed and offered him their condolences. They have also started the process of deciding whether to pay compensation which, in past accidental killings, has ranged from \$2,000 to \$9,000.

Afghan officials are also scrambling to defuse what could become a volatile flashpoint in public anger against the coalition forces. President Hamid Karzai phoned Muhammed's uncle and the governor of Kandahar province has invited Muhammed to a meeting this weekend.

The grieving father's threat to kill Canadians could very well be idle but, in a culture that places great importance on pride and vengeance, it is not a threat to be taken lightly.

Village elders in the Panjwaii district say the Taliban routinely use the accidental killing of civilians to whip up anger at the coalition forces and recruit new fighters.

"The Taliban is saying, 'Don't go to the government for compensation, come and join us,'" said elder Haji Fazal Muhammed. "They say, 'If you want to take revenge this is the opportunity.'"

Fazal Muhammed said people in the Panjwaii district are "confused and upset" by Sunday's shooting because the NATO-led force has the most up-to-date weapons that can see at night and over long distances. They don't understand how soldiers could accidentally shoot children.

He said anger at coalition troops, especially Canadians, is growing in the district not just because of the shooting but because reconstruction work is moving too slowly. He said several members of the weekly district shura - a meeting of local leaders and Canadians - boycotted Thursday's gathering as a protest.

"There's no use talking to the Canadians," said Fazal Muhammed.

A Canadian official acknowledged work on some projects, such as school construction, has slowed down over the summer as a result of increased violence during the summer fighting "season." He added construction will pick up in the fall when the pace of fighting usually slackens.

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