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## **NETHERLANDS: Small group of orthodox Muslims causing problems in mosques, Council of Mosques says**

By Janene Pieters

NL.Times.NL (17.02.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2P76Nsh> – A small group of younger, orthodox Muslims are causing problems in mosques by pressuring other believers to follow a the “strict” course, Said Bouharrou, vice-president of the Council of Moroccan Mosques in the Netherlands, said to the parliamentary committee investigating foreign influence in Dutch Islamic

institutions on Monday, NOS reports.

“They are told ‘you are not a good Muslim’,” Bouharrou said. This small group of orthodox believers also accuse other Muslims of sowing divisions in the faith, he said.

According to Bouharrou, there are 15 to 20 mosques in the Netherlands that are ultra-orthodox and causing problems. And the silent majority does not make itself heard. But he thinks that by acting more strongly, the Muslim community can solve this problem itself. “The solution is that they enter into the public debate,” Bouharrou said, adding that this also means speaking out against orthodox or extremist preachers on social media.

Influences from the Gulf states must be tackled, he stressed. “We have to do something to make those influences smaller,” Bouharrou said. It is “by definition” undesirable if people from abroad are involved in the boards of Dutch mosques, he said.

The government’s role is limited, because acting may infringe on the freedom of religion, Bouharrou said. But certain obligations to openness and transparency, and supporting the “resilience” of the Muslim community can help, he said.

Bouharrou also said that he was shocked by threats aimed at Hajer Harzi of the Al Houda mosque in Geleen, after she spoke to the parliamentary committee. He called her testimony brave. “We need more such heroes in the country,” he said.

Monday was the fourth day of witness hearings in an investigation the Tweede Kamer launched after NRC and Nieuwsuur reported that at least 30 Islamic organizations in the Netherlands receive funding from conservative Gulf states like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month a group of Islamic organizations asked the Tweede Kamer, the lower house of Dutch parliament, to not focus only on mosques in their investigation, but also look into foreign money flows to political parties, churches and synagogues.

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