

Muslims tap educator for key executive role: Islamic Society of North America

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The Islamic Society of North America, one of the broadest umbrella Muslim organizations based in the U.S., has appointed Chicago lawyer and youth leader Safaa Zarzour as its next secretary general.

Zarzour's appointment comes on the heels of several terror-related incidents that have cast suspicion on Muslim Americans and provoked concerns about Muslim youth being vulnerable to extremist propaganda.

Zarzour, 45, has acknowledged the concerns. "We need to have the ability to pay attention to our youth and make sure they aren't being swayed by influences that are contrary to Islam," he said. "We need better training of our own cadre of imams who can contextualize Islam in terms of the American experience."

A Syrian-born educator who has lived in the U.S. since the 1980s, Zarzour has 10 years of experience as a teacher and principal at the large Universal School in Chicago. He chairs the Council of Islamic Schools of North America, an association of 50 schools and organizations.

Unlike other well-known Muslim groups that focus on civil rights issues, the ISNA, based in Plainfield, Indiana, deals with education, youth and community organizing.

Zarzour said his main responsibility will be to advise and support the work of Ingrid Mattson, a Canadian-born convert who was elected ISNA's first female president in 2006. Zarzour replaces Muneer Fareed, an Islamic studies professor who resigned his position in late 2008. *-Religion News Service*