

Southwest Airlines apologizes to Muslim passenger

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(RNS) Southwest Airlines has apologized to a Muslim woman who claims she was removed from a flight from San Diego on Sunday (March 13) because of her Islamic headscarf and South Asian background.

"We sincerely apologize for the customer's inconvenience, and we regret that she was unable to travel as scheduled," the airline said in a statement issued Wednesday after Irum Abbasi, a U.S. citizen originally from Pakistan, demanded an apology.

Abbasi, a 31-year-old mother of three, was traveling to San Jose, Calif. when she was escorted off the plane. A crew member thought she was acting suspicious, and had said "It's a go," in a cell phone conversation.

Abbasi claims she actually said "I've got to go" because the plane was about to take off.

"She was an emotional wreck. She was crying," said Edgar Hopida, a spokesman for the San Diego chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "We need to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone else."

Abassi's ejection occurred the same day that Alaska Airlines removed three Jewish passengers from a flight because ritual prayers they were saying before take-off alarmed crew members.

Abbasi was later met by TSA officers who realized the error and did not search her or her bags. Southwest gave Abbasi a ticket for the next flight to San Jose, and a travel voucher "as a gesture of goodwill."

A Southwest spokesman said the airline was investigating the incident, but that it was against company policy to discuss whether any

employees will be disciplined.