

New Zealand massacre survivor receives top award for civilian bravery

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(AP Photo/Vincent Thian, File)

Abdul Aziz was among ten people to receive New Zealand's highest honor for civilian bravery on December 16, 2021. Aziz is one of two Muslim worshipers who at different times charged toward a gunman to try to stop his massacre.

Aziz survived after dodging bullets and chasing the gunman away in the 2019 attack at two Christchurch mosques, in which 51 people were killed. Naeem Rashid, the other worshiper, was killed when he tried to tackle the gunman.

The New Zealand Cross has previously been given to just two other people since it was founded in 1999.

In an interview the day after the shooting, Aziz said he didn't feel fear or much of anything at all when he faced down the gunman while his sons remained inside the mosque. He felt like he was on autopilot, he said, and that God did not think it was his time to die.

New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern said that each of the ten people who were given awards put their lives at risk to save others.

"The courage demonstrated by these New Zealanders was selfless and extraordinary," she said. "They have our deepest respect and gratitude for their actions on that day." —Associated Press