

Aotearoa Muslim is proud to support Isis

BLAIR ENSOR, The Press, Christchurch

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Christchurch Muslim convert Aaron Tahuu, 33, aka Yusif Haroon Mik'eal supports Islamic State's mission but not the atrocities.



KIRK HARGREAVES

NO SECRETS: Aaron Tahuu, a fundamentalist Muslim, says he is one of more than a dozen people in Christchurch who have similar beliefs.

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A bearded Aaron Tahuhu, wearing a brown robe and jandals, looks out over green fields near his home.

In years to come, he hopes to look out on desert sands near Mecca.

Tahuhu is one of Christchurch's fundamentalist Muslims. To some, he fits the description of an extremist.

A member of the Aotearoa Maori Muslim Association, he openly supports Islamic State and claims to be in contact with people on the front lines in the Middle Eastern conflict.

His Facebook page features articles and videos about the group and many of his friends are Muslim converts.

Tahuhu, 33, also known as Yusif Haroon Mik'eal, says the public have nothing to fear.

Yesterday, at his rural home in Belfast, he told The Press he supported Islamic State's efforts to establish an Islamic caliphate but denounced atrocities committed by some members of the group in Syria and Iraq.

"I've got no intentions of blowing anything up or going out and finding a disbeliever and beheading them in a mall or anything like that," Tahuhu said.

Christchurch was host to more than a dozen people who had beliefs similar to his, he said.

Prime Minister John Key this week said up to 80 Kiwis were being monitored over their links to Islamic State, which has called for lone wolf-style terrorist attacks on Western targets.

Some were fighting in Syria and an unknown number, from a watch list of up to 40, wanted to take up arms there.

Others were either financing the terrorist organisation, attempting to radicalise others, or actively promoting terrorist attacks within New Zealand, Key said.

Another 40 people needed to be investigated.

New Zealand troops could help Iraqi forces fight Islamic State but Key ruled out sending SAS or any soldiers in combat roles.

Tahuu said that if New Zealand did engage in fighting with the Islamic State he would be forced to travel overseas.

"I can't stay in a country that's going to be fighting my religion. If my country is going to make me an enemy of my country then I have no choice but to go and move to the Islamic State where I will be welcomed as a citizen . . . and not be persecuted for my religion or my beliefs."

If he did move to the Middle East, he would work as an engineer to help rebuild infrastructure, he said.

A New Zealand Security Intelligence Service spokesperson would not confirm if Tahuu was on the Government's watch list.

Tahuu claimed two detectives spoke to him about six to eight weeks ago and said he was being monitored.

They told him his conversion to Islam and extensive criminal history meant "I fit a criteria that says I may become a potential homeland terror threat".

"They basically wanted to let me know that they were watching me and if I made any covert plans to move then I would have my passport taken off me."

He would be allowed to travel overseas but only if he was transparent about his plans, Tahuu said.

Tahuu grew up in Aranui. He was exposed to alcohol, drugs and violence and by his late teens he was already serving time for aggravated robbery. After being released from prison, he committed burglaries, cultivated cannabis and found himself in trouble with the law again - ending up behind bars for about seven years.

About two years ago, disillusioned with Christianity, he converted to Islam at the Christchurch mosque on Deans Ave.

It was a decision that changed his life.

"They [the Government] can watch me all they like. I've got nothing to hide," he said.

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