There are more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide, and most of them reject the violence embraced by Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

In fact, just nine days after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush reminded Americans that al Qaeda represents a “fringe movement” that’s disapproved of by nearly every Muslim scholar. In addition, Muslim leaders in the U.S. and elsewhere were quick to condemn terrorism and explain how terrorist violence goes against Islam’s most sacred beliefs. Even the president of Iran—a nation that has had a rocky relationship with the United States—criticized the attacks and expressed sympathy for the victims.

Nevertheless, after 9/11 many Muslims were victimized by ignorant people who blamed them for al Qaeda’s actions. Sadly, Muslim houses of worship called mosques were vandalized, religious services were disrupted, and ordinary folks were verbally or physically threatened on city streets.

Followers of a religion called Sikhism became targets as well. Sikhism has its roots in northern India, and it is completely unrelated to Islam. However, many of its followers wear beards and headdresses called turbans. With television images of al Qaeda members (who also often have beards and wear headdresses) in mind, many people began lumping the two groups together. And that was—and is—terribly wrong.

When someone makes a judgment about another person based on something like appearance, race, religion, age, or sexual orientation, it’s called prejudice. It’s important to get to know people before you decide whether or not you like them and their ideals. Disrespecting people just because they seem different than you is just not cool!