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Anti-gay Muslim leader attends dinner with PM

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Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull didn't know he was dining with an anti-gay Islamic preacher at an interfaith dinner until his staff alerted him.

But the prime minister now regrets the invitation to Sheikh Shady Alsuleiman, urging him to recant comments that gay people were responsible for spreading HIV and other diseases.

"Had I known that the sheikh had made those remarks he would not have been invited to the iftar."

Mr Turnbull became the first prime minister to host the fast-breaking dinner for the holy month of Ramadan on Thursday.

But the significance of it was overshadowed by the preacher's invitation, which Mr Turnbull blames on an oversight by his department.

The prime minister was at pains to emphasise the sheikh's attendance should not take away from an event aimed at community harmony.

"It is also wrong to seek to define the views of all 500,000 Muslims because of the opinions expressed by one person, by one cleric."

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce picked up on that message, urging Australians to look at the regional Queensland town of Mareeba.

"When you go to towns like that you can see overwhelmingly people have one desire, to live unharmed, to work together," the Nationals leader said.

"It's the most beautiful metaphor of what Australia is about."

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said he wouldn't meet the sheikh any time soon.

"If I do so in the future ... I will tell him that his views are out of line with mainstream Australian thinking."

During the dinner Mr Turnbull emphasised the importance of tolerance, saying acts of terror like Sunday's massacre in Orlando, were perpetrated to divide along lines of race, religion, sect and sexuality.

That kind of hatred and division must not prevail, he said.

AAP