

In the Face of Violence: A Call to Unity and Responsibility

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Paris, France - On this day of national mourning, on behalf of the Universal Peace Federation, we pray for the 12 people killed in the Jan. 7 attack and for all the wounded. We express our deepest sympathy to the relatives of the victims. As French people and as human beings, their assassination deeply hurt us.

The assassins claim they killed in the name of God; this is blasphemous. Terrorism, which draws its power from resentment and revenge, contradicts the deepest teaching of religions. All the Muslim leaders who honor us by working with the Universal Peace Federation condemn terrorism as against Islam.

A serious question remains: "How to bring an end to the spiral of terror?" People already feel that mere political or police measures will not be enough. Thus, civil society is reacting and spontaneous gatherings are taking place in public areas for prayer and meditation. But recent experience has shown the limitation of immediate displays of emotion and slogans. Slogans such as "Bring back our girls" and "Not in my name" have been repeated throughout the world, with little results. What shall we say and do after "I am Charlie"?

The attack against Charlie Hebdo is a blow against freedom, especially freedom of expression, which is so fundamental to democracy. But when the pursuit of truth is not imbued with sensitivity towards and respect for others, it leads to conflict. Every time we humiliate and offend others in the name of freedom of expression, whether on social networks or in the media, we risk fueling senseless hatred. Religious beliefs are precious to many people in the world, and they have the right to be respected for their deepest convictions.

Based on religious motives, this kind of terror needs a religious response, or rather, an interreligious response against the destructive self-centeredness of the terrorists' motivation. This response should affirm the absolute value of human life and the core unity of all members of the human family. Thus, in order to transcend conflicts, democracy needs to be based on universal ethics, on the core values of great religions: benevolence, mercy and love of neighbor.

In the face of the potentially increasing violence, the Universal Peace Federation calls for an alliance of religions, beyond their historical conflicts, in order to give a new sense of direction to democracy. It calls for more cooperation between political and religious leaders, which is the only way to maintain democratic peace. It calls for the responsibility of the media in relation to religious, social and political peace. Together with our Ambassadors for Peace, we will renew our determination to support these efforts in our nation and in the world.