

March 15, 2019

Kia Kaha

Dear friends,

When I woke up this morning, I planned to send out some reflections on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. But then, once again, in a way that is still shocking, numbing and terrifying, I read of another slaughter driven by religious bigotry and hate.

This time, the place is New Zealand, in a city whose name evokes the Christian roots of its European settlers, Christchurch—but is home to a rich and diverse community including women, men and children of the Muslim faith.

Today, it was this Muslim community that was gunned down, during a sacred time of prayer. Just like the Jewish community observing the Sabbath in Pittsburgh, the Christians conducting a prayer service in Charleston when Dylan Roof began shooting, and the Sikhs preparing for prayer in their Gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

Sadly, it's clear that the New Zealand slaughter is not an accident of fate. It is part of the systematic murder of believers during their holiest times. Our hearts hurt and I cannot imagine the families in New Zealand today, their shock, their tears and how they will now have to live with a new and emptier reality.

But I am also furious. Because hate is a word whose meaning has been diluted. We hear it over and over, and our capacity to understand what it really means has been dimmed through repetition, name-calling, demonizing and repeated slaughters by white supremacists who target people based on their beliefs, color and identities. But hate is powerful and it motivates too many people. Through a manifesto publicly circulated by the killer, he concedes this when he "credits" the language and violence of American hate for rousing him to protect white supremacy and target Muslims.

When are we going to learn that hate words inspire violence? Isn't it time to marginalize those who normalize hate and the idea of using violence? Isn't that a way to rebuild our society?

The death of 49 Muslims in New Zealand today is a horrific and personal tragedy for each family affected, for the Christchurch community, the country of New Zealand and all of us. It is also reminder of the lessons that we need to heed and the extremism we need to resist.

Kia Kaha,

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CEO