

Ethnic Conflict and Violence - 1993

Therefore was a single human being created: to teach you that to destroy a single human soul is equivalent to destroying an entire world....And a single human being was created for the sake of peace, that none might say: My lineage is greater than yours! (C. Stern (ed), Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook. New York: CCAR, 1988, p. 690)

Issue

In many parts of the world during these closing years of the 20th century, severe increases in ethnic conflict, violence and terrorism are causing loss of homes, property and life among multitudes, involving vast social and economic distress.

Background

An ethnic group, experts state, is a distinct category in the population of a society. The group's culture is generally different from that of the majority and its members feel bound together whether by ties of race, nationality, religion or otherwise. Distinct ethnic groups are widespread, have been in existence since early periods of history and often are economically disadvantaged and politically powerless vis-à-vis the majority population.

Today, years after World Wars I and II and the colonial era and in the post-Cold War period, unexpected intense ethnic conflicts continue to erupt. Some are due to the loss of imposed national boundaries or dictatorships which forced ethnic groups that had long known tensions one with another to remain together; others are the result of rising desire for separate national, religious or cultural identity. As the conflicts intensify, civil wars, violence and terrorism escalate, even when for centuries some ethnic neighbors had lived in harmony. The casualty figures worldwide of civilians and the military are not available, but it must be remembered that in Bosnia alone the death toll is estimated to be over 200,000.

There are today at least 18,998,797 refugees worldwide, of whom two-thirds are women and children. To this figure must be added more than 24,000,000 displaced within their own countries. Furthermore, these sad figures may be increased by another 1/2 to 2 million from Bosnia-Herzegovina alone if population transfers occur when the fighting ends. Obviously, whenever and wherever peace is finally achieved, to the human costs in each former conflict area must also be added the losses from social and economic changes and numbers for possible indemnifications and rebuilding of destroyed property and institutions.

Violence by extremists is also on the increase both within countries of conflict and beyond their borders to citizens of other lands thought friendly toward an enemy side or for purposes of international publicity and impact. These tragic realities cry for non-violent, humanitarian, neutral continuing action by the United Nations and by governments and concerned citizens of many countries.

Resolution

To address the current tragic ethnic conflicts and violence, the Women of Reform Judaism urge:

- 1) Their respective governments to support by themselves and through United Nations efforts the seeking of just solutions through continued diplomacy, humanitarian multinational aid, as well as necessary funding and

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- personnel;
- 2) Education of their members through study groups, materials and speakers on all of the issues involved worldwide;
 - 3) Differentiation between religious fundamentalism and its adherents and acts of political violence committed by some adherents in the name of religion, whether motivated by political considerations or by belief, with respect and understanding of the former and justifiable objection to the latter;
 - 4) Vigilance in communities against terrorism by remaining alert to possible acts of violence and swiftly reporting suspicions to authorities;
 - 5) Reviewing without hysteria immigration policies of their countries, seeking modifications where necessary to admit valid refugees and eliminate entrance of terrorists through inadequate study of their backgrounds;
 - 6) Dialogues activated by sisterhoods among the diverse ethnic groups in their communities, especially Jewish/Muslim dialogue, to advance mutual respect and tolerance for diversity as well as to open doors for wider friendship and knowledge of each group's essential concerns; and
 - 7) Support for inter-group dialogues and conferences held nationally and internationally which may become powerful agents of harmonious ethnic agreements.