

NARLA and Church State Council Condemn Religious Violence Against Sikhs in Wisconsin

As Christians and Americans, we are shocked and outraged at the shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, and the senseless slaughter of innocent Americans gathered to worship. We offer our condolences and our prayers for the families and friends of those who were slain.

The United States is a place of diverse cultures and religions. All are welcome, all are equally American. The Sikh people are our friends, our neighbors, and our fellow Americans. We want to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Sikh American community, and to urge all Americans to overcome this evil with the compassion, generosity, hospitality and friendship which represents the best of the American spirit.

There is no place for intolerance in our nation, no place for religious bigotry. In America, there is no “us” and “them.” For Americans come from everywhere, and belong to every religion. We cherish the freedom to have our own beliefs, just as we defend one another’s right to believe differently.

We urge Americans to let this tragedy be a catalyst to learn about the Sikh people, about their history, their religion, and their character, and to welcome Sikhs throughout our communities. Sikhs have often been mistaken for Muslims, and subjected to violence intended for Muslims. We condemn religious bigotry and intolerance no matter who is the object.

We also condemn the desecration of a house of worship. A temple is a place where people go to find hope and peace, tranquility and security God and community. Now this Wisconsin temple has been transformed into a place of violence, of fear and anxiety, and yes, terror.

It would be a mistake to view this as an isolated evil act perpetrated by one American. It is the inevitable result of a disease which our nation largely ignores – the disease of racial and religious stereotyping that stokes the fires of smouldering hatred until they flame up into overt acts of violence.

We must not condone such bigotry and hatred, either actively or by our silence. Rabbi Joachim Prinz, who was kicked out of Germany in 1937 for being so outspoken in his opposition to the Nazi regime, made some critical observations about the Holocaust which are timely to recall now: *When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence. A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder. America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent.*

Rabbi Prinz is right: our silence becomes acceptance. Americans must be much more proactively engaged in eradicating the disease of religious bigotry, or it will continue to take innocent lives.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have worked side by side with our Sikh friends in pushing for stronger legal protections for religious freedom in the workplace. Together, we passed a measure in the Oregon legislature, pursued legislation in Congress, and are in the midst of an effort in California to enact AB 1964, sponsored by the Sikh Coalition, to strengthen protections for all people of faith who are threatened with the loss of their jobs for no other crime than their faith. We have found our Sikh friends to be warm, intelligent, compassionate people, who share the best of American values.

Finally, we invite Americans of all faiths to mourn with those who are mourning, and to provide whatever support is needed by the families of those who were killed. Let our prayers be mingled with tears, as we seek to bless those who continue to suffer the lingering results of the tragic loss of innocent life.

written by Alan J. Reinach, president of [The Church State Council](#) and executive director of [NARLA-West](#).