

HUFFPOST RELIGION

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Every Little Bit Helps

By Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf

Today's geopolitical situation cries out for solutions to prejudice, just as the environment in the United States 50 years ago did. The stakes for solving the racially-based inequities Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw, felt, and fought to change were and remain no less important to the fabric of the United States than the discrimination many American Muslims experience today. Frankly, the spite some radical Muslims feel against Americans demands equal attention and resolution.

Much needs to be done on local, regional and national levels to have a meaningful impact on the global scene. For example, my organization joined Peter Yarrow of the folk music group Peter, Paul, and Mary, and others in a March 10 commemoration of an event a half century ago, an event that as President Obama said over the weekend, "led a nation." Entitled, "From Selma to Now," the event at New York's All Soul's Church, was symbolic of how inter-faith and inter-racial passion, patience, and perseverance can create, maintain and sustain a movement to mitigate marginalization.

Bigotry is inherently malevolent in every aspect. Often, it is based on ignorance. Sometimes, it is based on wrongheaded hate. In other instances, it is fostered by a sense of racial, religious, political, or economic exceptionalism. It is always destructive. Throughout history, it has been a human weakness.

As much of a shortcoming as bigotry is in some of civilization, the need, desire, and commitment to mitigate it, is a wonderful countering human trait shared by most. Thankfully, there are thousands of individuals and organizations around the world, fighting ignorance, hate and scorn.

For example, in Pakistan recently, students encircled Holi celebrations at Karachi's Swami Narayan Temple so that Hindu worshipers could celebrate securely.

In the UK, a group of Muslims have transformed a derelict church into an inter-faith community center that sponsors cultural, spiritual and educational events for audiences of all faiths. Its success is refreshing.

In Norway, Muslims formed a "circle of peace" around a synagogue in the wake of the Paris attacks on a Jewish market. Subsequently, hundreds of Norwegians responded with a similar show of support of religious freedom and tolerance at a Mosque.

Social media initiatives to promote inter-faith harmony have fostered movements that see Muslims volunteering to join Christians in fasting for Lent.

Earlier this week I participated in an inter-religious forum on SiriusXM Radio, where New York's Cardinal Dolan moderated a panel of clerics from Judaism, Islam, and Christianity to explore similarities in these three Abrahamic faiths and their approach to fighting extremism and intolerance.

I cannot confirm that what I've outlined will eliminate the bigotry some feel against Muslims. Nor can I say that these activities will alone obliterate the scourge of misguided terrorists who besmirch the perception of billions of Muslims the world over. I know, though, that doing something to enhance Muslim-western relations is better than relinquishing a beautiful religion to extremists.

I could confirm though, that more initiatives by Muslims and non-Muslims to engage, understand, and be willing to learn about each other will eventually inspire moderate Muslims everywhere to be proud of their faith and have the confidence to explain it to others peacefully as it is, not as it has been propagandized. With the commitment of many to defy the actions of a few, Muslims, too, will someday celebrate a success similar to the one observed last month at the All Souls Church in New York.