

THE NATIONAL EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PEOPLE OF FAITH

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1972 was the year I left Chicago and came to Indianapolis to pursue my training. The Mayor of Indianapolis was Richard Lugar and the crime rate was low. That year, there were 77 murders. The number of homicides in 1997 was 160 and in the first 5 months of 1998, it is already 65.

Violence is not an isolated phenomenon, but a national disease to the proportion of an epidemic. If 40 jumbo jets crash every year killing 500 passengers in each plane, it will get everyone's attention, but not the homicides which kill more than 20,000 Americans every year.

Let us look at some crime statistics: According to the FBI 13.9 million crimes are committed every year. They include one homicide every 27 minutes, one theft every 5 minutes, one motor vehicle stolen every 30 seconds, one rape every 8 minutes, and only 50% of nearly 200,000 rapes are reported, robbery every 78 seconds, aggravated assault every 2 minutes, burglary every 10 minutes, a total of half a million yearly.

Crime by children or against children is also on the rise. It is said that a 12 year old child has an 89 percent chance of becoming a victim of a violent crime, and the biggest danger to a black young man is another black man. Every year 850,000 children are abused including 500,000 sexually, or 988 per day. Every year, 1,225 children die as a result of abuse and 3,288 children run away from home and end up on the streets.

I am not surprised at the recent killing in Springfield Oregon and Jonesboro Arkansas by young children, knowing that 1.2 million kids have access to guns. A total of 5 million firearms are in circulation not including the firearms by law enforcement agencies. We have more firearms in circulation than any other civilized western country. In the U.S.A. there are 14.2 guns per 100,000 population. The number for Denmark is 2.05, and Japan 0.5.

Yes we are number one. We are number one not only as a super power and being the wealthiest and strongest nation, but the highest in crime as well. For 100,000 people, the U.S. has a homicide rate of 9.4 while that of the U.K. is 2, and Japan 1.2 for comparison. Though we are number one among those who believe in the commandment "thou shalt not steal", we have also the highest number of robberies. For 100,000, the figure for the U.S. is 45; U.K. 9; Japan 1. We are also

number one in the number of drug offenders. For 100,000 population, the U.S. has 346 drug offenders as compared to the U.K. of 56, and Japan of 1.

More American women are raped than any other country in the world. For 100,000 women, the rape incidents are 114 in the U.S., 9 in the U.K., and 7 in Japan. 4 million women are physically abused every year by their husbands or boyfriends to seek emergency treatment.

Domestic violence leads to the death of 2000 women every year. 25% of all attempted suicide by women is by those who were battered.

I am concerned about these statistics because they do affect me; Even if I am not a victim, my children can be victims in a school shootout, my home can be burglarized, my car can be stolen, my wife can be mugged on the street, or I could be the victim of a drive by shooting.

The root causes of crime in our society are too many. To start with, we have more poverty in this country than we deserve. About 40 million people are below the poverty level including 10 million children. Drugs are an easy way to become rich. With drugs come crime.

Alcohol is promoted in society and glamorized on TV. About one third of all 1.4 million inmates in the country had a drink before they committed the crime which led to their incarceration. Television, rap music, and even certain comic books these days, not only promote, but glamorizes violence against women, minorities, and every one else.

A child who watches 2 hours of television a day, will see 5,000 acts of violence per year. It may be fun while he is watching. Being a physician, I understand that lasting impressions of seeing acts of violence without any pain is made in the brain, and during situations when this child will grow up and lose self control, he will resort to violence just as he saw on TV.

Nearly 25 percent of children have only one parent who has to work to make a living. Therefore, such children are raised by television.

It is the lack of a functional father which has a negative effect on childrens' development. Even if the father is present, he does not necessarily spend quality time with his children.

In the case of the Jonesboro shooting, the family spent more time teaching children how to practice shooting targets than discussing moral values.

This is an unforgiving society that we live in. We become angry quickly and we want to get revenge. This has been the main reason for drive by shootings when someone overtakes or tails behind. We have a lack of respect for the law and the officers who put their lives at risk in trying to enforce the law, are hated by the criminals.

We have different sets of values. One for ourselves, and one for others. Most importantly, we have a lack of contentment and peace with ourselves, our families, our community, colleagues, co-workers, and above all, with our creator. We have imprisoned the creator to the house of worship be it a synagogue, church, or mosque where we can visit him when we want to, but would not allow him to come out and enter into our homes and hearts to regulate our lifestyles.

Some say the law is too lenient on criminals however, when we tell about applying strict Islamic laws we are called barbarian. The punishment for a habitual thief is the same in the Quran and the Old Testament.

Caliph Ulmer did not cut the hands off of 4 thieves as they stole food because of hunger when there was famine. Islam is very much interested in establishing a society that is pure, that is free from the filth of sin and crime, a society in which men and women would live in total freedom from fear of all kinds, including fear of crimes and violence. It, therefore, wishes to build that society on foundations of piety, fear of God, and absolute justice, in which each person would respect the rights of other people and would not trespass on them.

What should be done? For a complicated disease in advance stages, it is not easy to suggest one treatment. We need to tackle it from every corner, and every possibility, at every level, and age. To begin with, we should stop buying toy guns for our children.

Nor should we watch, buy, or rent videos and slasher movies which promote violence. This is in our hands. We cannot turn off the TV, but we can install V-chips, or when the scenes of violence come, then we can turn it off at that time, or use that occasion to instill in the minds of young people what violence can lead to.

We must regulate the number of guns which are available and also the firepower and safety measure that they have. If one decides to keep a firearm at home, it should be unloaded and should have a security lock in a safe place with no access to children. We must teach our young people to control their anger and to control revenge.

We need to teach them to settle their disputes without resorting to provocative words or actions. We need to be more forgiving.

What is good for our children is good for us as well. Children bringing firearms to school should be reported, but instead of punishing them, their guardians or parents should be punished.

When a child is expelled from school, he does not become a very happy person. We should tell the drug dealers that they are the cancer of society, and for the sake of money and the pleasure of this world, they have sold the future of our youth.

Mayor Stephen Goldsmith recently wrote and I agree, "The Government can lock up all of the criminals, but cannot produce good people".

Therefore, it is the responsibility of parents, teachers, and people of faith to bring values into their own lives and the lives of their children at home, and in school. We must instill the value of sanctity of life and invite God to be a member of our families. We can start this now in our homes, our work places, our places of worship and our schools. Prayer never hurt anyone, so let us pray for peace as taught by Prophet Mohammed:

"Oh Lord, You are peace from You comes peace let us live in peace let us enter the home of peace"