

Joint Statement Condemning Acts of Religious Hatred

Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues

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Baltimore, MD

As religious leaders of the Catholic and Jewish communities in the United States, we are alarmed by a wave of attacks on synagogues and Jews that have occurred in North America and Europe in the past several weeks. Scores of acts of vandalism and numerous personal assaults have been reported.

We condemn any acts of desecration of holy places or deeds of verbal or physical violence that threaten any person's ability to practice their religion freely. Such actions we repudiate as sinful and offensive to God according to both the Christian and Jewish traditions.

The words declared by Pope John Paul II during a Christian-Jewish-Muslim interreligious dialogue in Jerusalem on March 23, 2000 speak to people of all faith:

"Religion is not, and must not become, an excuse for violence, particularly when religious identity coincides with cultural and ethnic identity. Religion and peace go together! Religious belief and practice cannot be separated from the defense of the image of God in every human being."

Regardless of any connections of this upsurge in religious hatred to the present conflict in the Middle East, the end of which we pray for fervently, there is no justification whatsoever for the violation of any people's religious liberties. Nor can anyone excuse despicable acts by appeals to religion. It is the particular responsibility of all religious leaders, wherever they may be, to uphold the biblical truth that every human being is created in the Image of God and so possesses an inviolable right to religious freedom.

The Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs reminds all Catholics that "the church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion" (*Nostra Aetate*, 5). Since Jews were the targets of the recent spate of hateful deeds, we reiterate to all the faithful that antisemitism is a sin against God and humanity (Pope John Paul II, Nov. 16, 1990) and that the Church "deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

The Jewish community has learned from bitter historical experience the cost to civility and religious values when the religious institutions of any community can be targeted without voices of conscience decrying and condemning such actions. "Do not stand idly by the blood of our neighbor." (Lev. 19). The value of "mpnei darchei shalom, (for "the sake of the ways of peace") teaches us to accord to all the benefits, rights, and protections accorded to any. For those reasons, the Jewish community has long spoken out against the desecration of any house of worship and against efforts to divide any community by pitting religious groups against one another.

As Catholics and Jews we have a solemn duty to oppose religious hatred, to assist the proper authorities if incidents of religious intolerance occur, and to stand in solidarity with any victims of such bigotry.