

Beat: Miscellaneous

PART II - REMARKS BY PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AT ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF BALTIMORE

BALTIMORE IN MARYLAND

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USPA NEWS - Below, Second Part of the intervention of U.S. President Barack Obama on February 3, 2016 at Islamic Society of Baltimore :

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'So part of the reason I want to lay out these facts is because, in the discussions that I was having with these incredibly accomplished young people, they were pointing that so often they felt invisible. And part of what we have to do is to lift up the contributions of the Muslim American community not when there's a problem, but all the time.

Our television shows should have some Muslim characters that are unrelated to national security -- (applause) -- because -- it's not that hard to do. There was a time when there were no black people on television. And you can tell good stories while still representing the reality of our communities.

Now, we do have another fact that we have to acknowledge. Even as the overwhelming majority -- and I repeat, the overwhelming majority -- of the world's Muslims embrace Islam as a source of peace, it is undeniable that a small fraction of Muslims propagate a perverted interpretation of Islam. This is the truth.

Groups like al Qaeda and ISIL, they're not the first extremists in history to misuse God's name. We've seen it before, across faiths. But right now, there is a organized extremist element that draws selectively from Islamic texts, twists them in an attempt to justify their killing and their terror. They combine it with false claims that America and the West are at war with Islam.

And this warped thinking that has found adherents around the world -- including, as we saw, tragically, in Boston and Chattanooga and San Bernardino -- is real. It's there. And it creates tensions and pressure that disproportionately burden the overwhelming majority of law-abiding Muslim citizens.

And the question then is, how do we move forward together ? How do we keep our country strong and united ? How do we defend ourselves against organizations that are bent on killing innocents ? And it can't be the work of any one faith alone.

It can't be just a burden on the Muslim community -- although the Muslim community has to play a role. We all have responsibilities. So with the time I have left, I just want to suggest a few principles that I believe can guide us.

First, at a time when others are trying to divide us along lines of religion or sect, we have to reaffirm that most fundamental of truths: We are all God's children. We're all born equal, with inherent dignity.

And so often, we focus on our outward differences and we forget how much we share. Christians, Jews, Muslims -- we're all, under our faiths, descendants of Abraham. So mere tolerance of different religions is not enough. Our faiths summon us to embrace our common humanity. 'O mankind,' the Koran teaches, we have 'made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.' (Applause.) So all of us have the task of expressing our religious faith in a way that seeks to build bridges rather than to divide.

Second, as Americans, we have to stay true to our core values, and that includes freedom of religion for all faiths. I already mentioned

our Founders, like Jefferson, knew that religious liberty is essential not only to protect religion but because religion helps strengthen our nation -- if it is free, if it is not an extension of the state. Part of what's happened in the Middle East and North Africa and other places where we see sectarian violence is religion being a tool for another agenda -- for power, for control.

Freedom of religion helps prevent that, both ways -- protects religious faiths, protects the state from -- or those who want to take over the state from using religious animosity as a tool for their own ends.

That doesn't mean that those of us with religious faith should not be involved. We have to be active citizenry. But we have to respect the fact that we have freedom of religion.

Remember, many preachers and pastors fought to abolish the evil of slavery. People of faith advocated to improve conditions for workers and ban child labor.

Dr. King was joined by people of many faiths, challenging us to live up to our ideals. And that civil activism, that civic participation that's the essence of our democracy, it is enhanced by freedom of religion.

Now, we have to acknowledge that there have been times where we have fallen short of our ideals. By the way, Thomas Jefferson's opponents tried to stir things up by suggesting he was a Muslim -- so I was not the first -- (applause.) No, it's true, it's true. Look it up. (Laughter.) I'm in good company. (Laughter.)

But it hasn't just been attacks of that sort that have been used. Mormon communities have been attacked throughout our history. Catholics, including, most prominently, JFK -- John F. Kennedy -- when he ran for President, was accused of being disloyal. There was a suggestion that he would be taking orders from the Pope as opposed to upholding his constitutional duties. Anti-Semitism in this country has a sad and long history, and Jews were excluded routinely from colleges and professions and from public office.

And so if we're serious about freedom of religion -- and I'm speaking now to my fellow Christians who remain the majority in this country -- we have to understand an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths. (Applause.) And when any religious group is targeted, we all have a responsibility to speak up. And we have to reject a politics that seeks to manipulate prejudice or bias, and targets people because of religion.

We've got to make sure that hate crimes are punished, and that the civil rights of all Americans are upheld. (Applause.) And just as faith leaders, including Muslims, must speak out when Christians are persecuted around the world -- (applause) -- or when anti-Semitism is on the rise -- because the fact is, is that there are Christians who are targeted now in the Middle East, despite having been there for centuries, and there are Jews who've lived in places like France for centuries who now feel obliged to leave because they feel themselves under assault -- sometimes by Muslims. We have to be consistent in condemning hateful rhetoric and violence against everyone. (Applause.)

And that includes against Muslims here in the United States of America. (Applause.)

So none of us can be silent. We can't be bystanders to bigotry. And together, we've got to show that America truly protects all faiths.

Which brings me to my next point: As we protect our country from terrorism, we should not reinforce the ideas and the rhetoric of the terrorists themselves. I often hear it said that we need moral clarity in this fight.

And the suggestion is somehow that if I would simply say, these are all Islamic terrorists, then we would actually have solved the problem by now, apparently. (Laughter.) Well, I agree, we actually do need moral clarity. Let's have some moral clarity. (Applause.)

Groups like ISIL are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders and holy warriors who speak for Islam. I refuse to give them legitimacy. We must never give them that legitimacy. (Applause.) They're not defending Islam. They're not defending Muslims.

The vast majority of the people they kill are innocent Muslim men, women and children. (Applause.)

And, by the way, the notion that America is at war with Islam ignores the fact that the world's religions are a part of who we are. We can't be at war with any other religion because the world's religions are a part of the very fabric of the United States, our national character. (Applause.)

So the best way for us to fight terrorism is to deny these organizations legitimacy and to show that here in the United States of America, we do not suppress Islam; we celebrate and lift up the success of Muslim Americans. That's how we show the lie that they're trying to propagate. (Applause.) We shouldn't play into terrorist propaganda. And we can't suggest that Islam itself is at the root of the problem. That betrays our values. It alienates Muslim Americans. It's hurtful to those kids who are trying to go to school and are members of the Boy Scouts, and are thinking about joining our military.

That kind of mindset helps our enemies. It helps our enemies recruit. It makes us all less safe. So let's be clear about that.

Now, finally, just as all Americans have a responsibility to reject discrimination -- I've said this before -- Muslims around the world have a responsibility to reject extremist ideologies that are trying to penetrate within Muslim communities.

Here at this mosque, and across our country and around the world, Muslim leaders are roundly and repeatedly and consistently condemning terrorism.

And around the globe, Muslims who've dared to speak out have often been targeted and even killed. So those voices are there; we just have to amplify them more. (Applause.)

And it was interesting, in the discussion I had before I came out, some people said, why is there always a burden on us? When a young man in Charleston shoots African Americans in a church, there's not an expectation that every white person in America suddenly is explaining that they're not racist.

They can Everybody is assumed to be horrified by that act. And I recognize that sometimes that doesn't feel fair.

But part of the answer is to make sure that the Muslim community in all of its variety, in all the good works that it's doing, in all the talent that's on display, that it's out there visible on a consistent basis -- not just at a certain moment. (Applause.)

But what is also true is, is that there is a battle of hearts and minds that takes place -- that is taking place right now, and American Muslims are better positioned than anybody to show that it is possible to be faithful to Islam and to be part of a pluralistic society, and to be on the cutting-edge of science, and to believe in democracy. (Applause.)

And so I would urge all of you not to see this as a burden, but as a great opportunity and a great privilege to show who you are. To use a little Christian expression -- let your light shine. Because when you do you'll make clear that this is not a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam.

This is a struggle between the peace-loving, overwhelming majority of Muslims around the world and a radical, tiny minority. And ultimately, I'm confident that the overwhelming majority will win that battle. (Applause.) Muslims will decide the future of your faith. And I'm confident in the direction that it will go.

TO BE CONTINUED WITH FINAL PART...

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