



FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
OF OFFICIAL
HUMAN RIGHTS
AGENCIES

Dear IAOHRA Member:

All of us are horrified by the events that took place at Ft. Hood. The International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies joins with our nation's leadership in condemning this horrific act and send our sincere condolences to the families of those service men and women who were killed or injured. We mourn our nation's loss and we pray for the speedy recovery of those who were injured.

In the coming days it is important that as Human Rights and Human Relations professionals we work to insure that our communities don't get caught up in a senseless effort to place blame and find fault. We know that this terrible tragedy has the potential to reignite the kind of anti-Muslim passions which were present following September 11, 2001. As Human Rights/Relations professionals we have a duty to encourage people to refrain from blaming all American Muslims for the alleged act of one individual who happens to be an American Muslim. The senseless loss of lives and the injury suffered by others should not be allowed to provide license or cause to vilify or harm others in the name of retribution.

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It is critical that we encourage our communities to allow the Military and Civilian investigations of this incident to be completed and that we allow our system of justice to operate as it should. We are intergroup relations specialist with a responsibility to reduce and eliminate intergroup tensions. This incident calls for our absolute attention and dedication to our mission. We call upon our leaders - in government, in faith communities, in business and in community and civic organizations - to speak out on this to prevent acts of prejudice and hatred against innocent Americans solely because of their appearance or religious beliefs. Let us not compound the tragic violence at Fort Hood with more tragedy, victimizing innocent people based on stereotypes and prejudice.

We need law enforcement leaders to stand with Americans of the Muslim faith, with Sikhs, and other vulnerable groups, to make it clear that our communities will not tolerate innocent Americans being made scapegoats for an act that they did not commit and do not condone. We need teachers and leaders in schools, faith communities, civic and business organizations of all types to engage with their respective stakeholders and members on this issue, and to discourage the bigotry and stereotyping against innocent fellow Americans that so easily emerge during these times of high emotion.

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It is the responsibility of the members of IAOHRA who are charged with the responsibility to eradicate intergroup tension and build better human relations to take a leadership role in fighting to prevent any effort to place blame or responsibility for this tragic event on any member of our community because of their religious beliefs or their place of origin. In times like these, it is incumbent on our membership to remind our fellow citizens that no matter where we come from or to whom we pray; we are all Americans and we have all suffered a significant loss. We are obliged to work together to heal our land and work to eliminate the divisions that can be the result of this horrible act. I challenge the IAOHRA Membership to step up and lead.

A District of Columbia
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Leon W. Russell, President
IAOHRA