

Statement of

The Honorable Dick Durbin

United States Senator
United States Senate
September 19, 2012

Last month, in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, a white supremacist shot and killed six Sikh worshipers in the Oak Creek Gurdwara.

Satwant Singh Kaleka was the founder of the Gurdwara. Mr. Kaleka fought off the gunmen with a butter knife, which gave others in the temple time to seek cover. Mr. Kaleka leaves behind his wife, two sons, and three grandchildren. Mr. Kaleka's son, Amardeep, and nephew, Kanwardeep, are with us today. Our deepest condolences on your loss.

Paramjit Kaur was a deeply religious woman. On the day of the shooting, she was at the Gurdwara for her daily morning prayers. Mrs. Kaur was devoted to her two sons, Kamaljit Singh Saini and Harpreet Singh Saini, working long hours so they could pursue their education. Kamaljit and Harpreet are here today. We will hear from Harpreet later in the hearing. You and your family are in our thoughts and prayers.

Prakash Singh Rathore had been a priest at the temple for six years. He immigrated to the United States in 2006 and was finally able to bring his wife and two children to the United States just two months ago, after six years of separation.

Ranjit Singh immigrated to the United States in 1997. Mr. Singh was a priest who played the tabla, an Indian drum, during religious ceremonies and mentored young people at the temple. He is survived by his wife and three children.

Sita Singh, Ranjit Singh's younger brother, immigrated to the United States in 1993. He was a priest at the temple, where he led morning prayers every day at 5 a.m. Sita Singh is survived by his wife and four children.

Suveg Singh Kattrra, who was 82 years old, was a farmer from India who immigrated to the United States with his wife eight years ago to join his son and daughter-in-law. He leaves behind his wife, five children and seven grandchildren.

Oak Creek Police Department Lieutenant Brian Murphy responded to the Gurdwara shooting and was shot nine times at close range. When other officers arrived at the scene, Lieutenant Murphy urged them to help other shooting victims first. Thankfully, Lieutenant Murphy, a 21-year veteran of the Oak Creek force, is expected to recover from his injuries.

Sadly, the shooting in Oak Creek was not an isolated incident. More than 6,600 hate crimes were reported to the FBI in 2010, the most recent year for which statistics are available. And a 2005 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that the actual number of hate crimes may be more than 20 times higher than the number reported to the FBI.

In the week following the Oak Creek shooting, there were numerous attacks on mosques, including a mosque being burned to the ground in Joplin, Missouri; a man shooting at a mosque in Morton Grove, Illinois, while 500 worshipers were praying inside; and an unidentified perpetrator throwing an improvised explosive at an Islamic school in Lombard, Illinois, during prayer services. According to the Justice Department, the increase in discrimination against mosques since 2010 "reflects a regrettable increase in anti-Muslim sentiment."

At the same time, African-Americans continue to be the targets of the vast majority of racially-motivated hate crimes; Jewish Americans continue to be the victims of most religiously-motivated hate crimes; Latinos are the victims of most ethnically-motivated hate crimes; and hundreds of LGBT Americans are the victims of violent hate crimes every year.

Three years ago, I was honored to stand by President Obama's side in the East Room of the White House as he signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Today we will hear about the Justice Department's use of this authority to investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

But what is the government doing to prevent hate crimes from taking place in the first instance? Are sufficient resources being devoted to combating the threat of violent domestic extremists and to protecting vulnerable communities?

The numbers speak for themselves. According to a study by the New America Foundation and Syracuse University, 18 people have been murdered in 10 right-wing terrorist attacks since 9/11, while 17 have been killed in 4 attacks by violent Muslim extremists. And, since 9/11, 15 domestic extremists have acquired chemical or biological weapons that they intended to use in attacks. As one public FBI report warned, "right-wing terrorists pose a significant threat due to their propensity for violence."

Since 9/11, Congress has held dozens of hearings on the threat posed by Al Qaeda and its affiliates. But this is the first hearing in recent years on the threat of violent domestic extremists. Of course, we need to continue our efforts to defeat Al Qaeda, but we cannot ignore the threat of homegrown non-Islamic terrorists.

In recent days, we have been reminded that many around the world do not appreciate America's unique approach to hate speech and blasphemy. So let me be clear. Under our Constitution, we punish criminal acts, not free speech, no matter how offensive or hateful it might be.

But, our leaders have a responsibility to speak out against hate speech. That's what President Obama has done in condemning the anti-Islamic movie that sparked the protests in the Muslim world.

And that's what President George W. Bush did. Six days after 9/11 - and 11 years ago this week - President Bush visited an Islamic Center in Washington DC to make it clear that our fight was with Al Qaeda, not American Muslims. President Bush said, "The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace."

I had many differences with President Bush, but - as I have said on many occasions - I believe that he helped to stop the anti-Muslim backlash after 9/11 by speaking out so clearly.

I am sorry to say that many political leaders are failing to follow the example set by President Obama and President Bush. To take just one recent example, several members of the House of Representatives have questioned the loyalty of American Muslims serving in the Obama Administration.

This kind of rhetoric is inconsistent with our heritage as a nation of immigrants. Most Americans recognize that our diversity is our strength, and don't question the religious background of their fellow citizens. When Lieutenant Murphy rushed into a hail of bullets at the Oak Creek Gurdwara, he wasn't concerned about the religion of the victims. He just knew that they needed help.

In conclusion, I hope this hearing will help us to redouble our efforts to combat the threat of domestic terrorism and to take whatever steps are necessary to protect vulnerable communities. Some would argue that we should not discuss our shortcomings while violent anti-American protests are raging in the Muslim world. They claim that America shows weakness when we

acknowledge our mistakes. I disagree. America is strongest when we lead by example. We are a country that can look ourselves squarely in the mirror and admit there is work still to be done to secure the promise of equal justice for all.