

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Fault Lines

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In February, a group in Yorba Linda, California organized a fundraising event to address homelessness and domestic violence in the city. It was like every other fundraising event for these purposes, down to the chicken dinner, except that it was organized by Muslims. People showed up in droves to protest. They carried signs that said, “The Devil is Islam” and waved American flags and shouted, “Get out of here! Terrorists!” and “You beat your women and you rape your children!” Protesters screamed “Go home!” – prompting one American Muslim to ask, “Where am I supposed to go? I was born here.” Women in scarves ran a gauntlet of hatred. One elected official said to the press, “I know quite a few Marines who would be very happy to help these terrorists to an early meeting in Paradise.”

Representative Peter King is convening a Congressional hearing to investigate the loyalty and radicalization of American Muslims. This visible forum and high public office is being used to implicate an entire class of people, separated by religion, in terrorism. It feeds anti-Muslim sentiment.

This is a fault line. A man-made, intentional fault line that seeks to divide Muslims from the rest of humanity. The protest line in Yorba Linda was the same. A fault line intended to blame and sow seeds of hatred.

Is this our best? To use our precious protected speech to sow hatred and division? To create fault lines by shouting slogans framed in ignorance? By refusing to know those we blame?

On Friday, Japan was struck by a massive earthquake and a tsunami that washed over whole cities. The world was reminded of the power unleashed when a fault line, under immense pressure, finally slips. It breaks the earth and everything on it, and sends waves of destruction across all boundaries.

Our attention span is short. In just the last few weeks, we watched intently as people all across the Middle East and Northern Africa rose up for freedom, decency, and an end to tyranny. They rose up peacefully and stood their ground against bullies and tyrants – many of whom the U.S. has financed for decades. In public squares across a dozen countries, women spoke and children waved flags and young men stood fast against rubber bullets and tear gas. Some stood fast until they were shot down by their own government forces in helicopters and planes. Yet they stood for freedom. They cleaned one another’s wounds and brought food and water to the hungry and thirsty. This is the Muslim world – a world where people seek a decent living for their families and a voice in the way they are governed, a world that demands peace not by force but through heroic demonstrations made peacefully in the face of terrible tyranny.

What an example they have set for the rest of us.

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