

A Death in the Family

By Judith Maxwell

Where did you turn when the news about the World Trade Centre flashed around the world? Most of us wanted to be with our families, or at least connect with them.

This was the week when children began to worry about their parents going to the office or on an airplane. It was the week when teenagers muttered to their mothers, "I love you!" When young men who have seen every disaster movie in ten years phoned home with shaky voices, when TV anchors talked about their own children. Why? There was a death in the family - in the human family.

But in this case, we do not rush to join the family and get to the funeral service. We rush to the television. We become voyeurs.

So what will we do about this experience in the coming months and years? Our task will be to "make the world a safer place." Some of the priorities will have to be tough-minded military and foreign policy measures. Some will be issues of public security. But there are other priorities that speak directly to the needs of the human family.

The origins of the hatred that motivated these horrific acts against ordinary human beings are inequality and injustice. People who have lost their land and their citizenship rights have lost their hope. And when there is no hope, there is no deterrent to violence. We see this in some of our most troubled Aboriginal communities.

The needs of human beings are basic. They need to be able to provide for their own physical survival - food, water, and shelter. To do this, they need to earn income or to own land. But to have hope, they also need the intimacy and support of family, a sense of belonging to a community, and a voice in that community.

There are many countries around the world and many residents of rich countries like Canada that do not have these basics. They have been denied the right to make a better life for themselves and their kin.

In fact, they live in a globalizing economy equipped with technologies which widen the gap between rich and poor. This economy is creating unprecedented wealth for some, at the same time that it creates insuperable barriers against human development for those who are oppressed and impoverished. What we have learned this week is that it no longer matters where people live. If they are filled with hate, they can mobilize our own technology to wreak unprecedented destruction.

The way to avoid a continuous round of destruction is to offer the oppressed and impoverished a way over the barriers against human development. We can give them hope by creating a civil society where people can earn a living and have access to education..

So, in the months and years to come, we must establish a new social and economic order for the human family - an order that not only defeats the terrorists but which addresses the injustice and inequality which breeds terrorism.

We in Canada have shown a remarkable capacity to ignore the homeless bodies that sleep at the foot of Bay Street's great office towers. We cannot permit human kind to become immune to acts of destruction like the ones we mourn this week.

Collectively, we have the capacity to prevent these evil acts from happening again. Out of our grief must come resolution - not just for military responses but also for the political, social, and economic choices which create civil societies.

Judith Maxwell is the President of Canadian Policy Research Networks, which can be reached at www.cprn.org