

The Hardest Thing

BY VICTORIA MCCABE
CRUSADER STAFF WRITER

Last Tuesday, the world witnessed a horrible tragedy. Thousands of lives were lost and countless more were shattered, but perhaps the most disturbing image broadcast over our television sets was not one of physical destruction or emotional despair, but rather one of rejoicing. Beyond the immediate ramifications of these horrific acts of violence emerges an even greater tragedy: the idea that human compassion has been lost. It does not matter the nationality, religion or race of those who danced at the news of the blow to America. What matters is the fact that in our world there are some who feel no sympathy for the suffering of others; the one sentiment that should transcend issues of political or religious rivalry is compassion for the lives of innocent people. Just as we mourn for the lives that have been lost or broken due to this tragedy, we should cry for those who cannot feel sorrow for their fellow world citizens in their time of suffering.

Amidst footage of the Twin Towers collapsing, the constant smoke rising, terrified people fleeing the ensuing stream of debris and scared, shocked onlookers weeping came one image that did not fit with the rest - a gathering of small children and adults cheering, jumping up and down, and waving flags in Ramallah in the West Bank. This group of individuals shared the sentiments of the Iraqi government, whose leader

Saddam Hussein called the attacks "deserved," and whose official newspaper Al-Iraq stated, "what happened in the United States [last Tuesday] is a lesson for all tyrants, oppressors and criminals." This reaction was obviously more than an unsettling sidebar as we tried to first comprehend that such a tragedy could be real and then to cope with our deep grief. It is incomprehensible that anyone could feel joy at the news of such utter destruction. But with our confusion and horror at the fact that there are people who rejoiced at our great loss, we must remember not to direct generalizations and hatred at other innocent people.

Palestinian Authority Cabinet member Hanan Ashrawi, who called the attacks "a blow to humanity as a whole," reminded the world that the celebrators were a small minority and that their joy was by no means a reflection of the reaction of the general Arab population. Her message must not be forgotten if we truly are to search for justice. For just as it is unacceptable that the perpetrators of this unspeakable crime go unpunished, it is equally unjust to harm all those innocent people who share the same nationality or faith as the terrorists, even if it is only with words of hate. To accuse all Arabs of condoning this crime against humanity would be the same as accusing all non-Jewish Germans of Nazism or all white Southerners of supporting slavery at the respective times of those crimes. There were Germans who hid Jewish refugees and helped

them escape to safety, there were white Southerners who participated in the underground railroad and helped slaves escape to freedom, and there are Arabs who would have done anything and everything in their power to save those who were in the World Trade Center on Tuesday.

The celebrating was by no means universal. Traditional enemies of the United States, such as Cuba, Syria, Libya and Iran, condemned the terrorist actions and offered condolences. Nations all around the world recognized last Friday as an international day of mourning and observed minutes of silence around makeshift memorials. According to CNN.com, NATO will declare that the actions fall under the mutual defense clause of its charter, which states that all member nations will treat the attack as if it were an attack on their own countries.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf issued a statement that said: "I wish to assure President Bush and the U.S. government of our unstinted cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Pakistan is committing all of its resources in an effort coordinated with the United States to locate and punish those involved in this horrific act."

Dan Meridor, an Israeli Cabinet minister, called out to nations who have traditionally supported terrorist actions. He told CNN: "Those countries should stop or become ostracized, become outcasts in the world. We saw the dreadful results yester-

day in New York and Washington. Now everybody should say where they stand - are they with those who fight terror, or are they with terror?"

Elation at the news of this horrific crime could not be farther from a universal sentiment, and it was not even a constant among Palestinians. Yassir Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, told CNN: "We are completely shocked. It's unbelievable. We completely condemn this very dangerous attack, and I convey my condolences to the American people, to the American president and to the American administration, not only in my name but on behalf of the Palestinian people."

But on the streets of Ramallah in the West Bank, there were people who danced. It does not matter if there were two hundred or if there were twenty. There were individuals who felt that the murder of thousands of innocent people was justified and that the United States, as an "oppressor," got "what it deserved." And they told their children. They gave them flags and told them that it was okay to laugh at America's pain, to dance at the shock the entire world received. What a lesson those children learned on Tuesday.

Hate breeds hate, and during a time when the vast majority of the world's citizens were weeping and questioning how such a horrific act could occur in a country that seemed so safe and secure, there was a small group of individuals who were planting in their children the seeds

of hatred. Regardless of who or how many, there are people who believe that such terrorist actions were justified. It only takes five people to get on a plane and destroy thousands upon thousands of lives. The cameras showed us the rejoicing of those who exalted those terrorists as heroes. Their dancing told the world that there are some who cannot feel compassion, who do not weep for the pain of innocent people. And the smiles of those children told the world that this could happen again. When one feels no compassion, when one feels no respect for any human life, he does not respect his own life, and he could be the one who will get on a plane with no intention of letting anyone get off.

The cameras certainly showed us a greater tragedy. As we cry for those we have lost, we cannot forget those around the world who are not crying. Military actions against their countries will not make them weep. They see the United States as the oppressor, the aggressor. We must unite as a nation to do the hardest thing of all in this time of great despair; we must show them compassion through our love and support for each other. We must punish those who are responsible for this crime, but that is where the aggression must stop. We must not stereotype, we must not take out our pain on other innocent people because of their nationality or creed. And if, God forbid, such a tragedy ever occur in any other nation, we must never, never dance.