

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Acts of kindness clouded by Islamophobia and anti-Semitism

By Douglas Kindschi

Director of Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

Last week, I wrote about the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris and whether it would increase the Islamophobia in France, as well as around the world.

The other tragic event two days later was the killing of Jewish shoppers at a kosher market in a Paris suburb. This highlights another terrible trend that peace-loving citizens of all countries need to be aware of: growing anti-Semitism.

Here in Grand Rapids, the Calvin College January Series brought to our attention the story of Tova Friedman, one

of the youngest survivors of Auschwitz. This month marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of that death camp, which murdered more than 1 million Jews. Tova's story was also told in an award-winning documentary, "Surviving Auschwitz: Children of the Shoah," which was filmed 10 years ago.

It will be aired again at 10 p.m. Tuesday on WGTV-TV. It will mark the actual date of the liberation, and which Tova, age 6 at the time, considers her "birthday."

A tragic part of her story is



Kindschi

that following the end of the war, anti-Semitic sentiment continued to plague the Jewish community.

Upon her return to her hometown in Poland she was repeatedly called "dirty Jew." Her schoolmates would throw rocks and sticks at her to the point where she wanted to stop attending school. In addition, her aunt was murdered while working in a jewelry store by an anti-Jewish gang of young people. The defeat of Hitler was not the end of Jewish persecution.

In France today, half of all racist attacks target Jews, even though Jews make up less than 1 percent of the population, and the number of anti-Semitic attacks has increased seven-fold

since the 1990s. Similar increases of such anti-Semitic sentiments and attacks have also been reported in other parts of Europe and in Great Britain. Hate crimes against Jews have increased in the United States, though not to the same extent as in Europe and the Middle East.

Last week's column also pointed out the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful. An inspiring part of the kosher market killings and hostage taking is the story of Lassana Bathily, a Muslim employee of the supermarket who hid a group of hostages in a cold-storage room in the basement. After getting them to safety, he told them to stay calm, turned off the lights and

closed the door while remaining upstairs. He escaped through a delivery shaft and was able to help the police by describing the layout of the store and giving them a key to open the metal shutters so the police could make their assault.

This Muslim store worker saved the lives of Jewish customers in this kosher market. Let us not stereotype any group because of the actions of the few violent criminals. Let us instead look for the stories of kindness and bravery that should mark the actions of all who act from faith to do what is right and promote peace.

— Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu