

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Can we reject fear and find hope in spite of the evidence?

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute

Can we find common ground, or will our disagreements and fear drive us apart? Our recent event brought together Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Donniel Hartman with the first imam at Duke University and currently the Chief Representative for Muslim Affairs, Abdullah Antepli. "Can We Find Common Ground Between Israel and Palestine?" was co-sponsored by the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies.

It is now available at both of our websites and on YouTube at youtu.be/uAlXk1Cl6t8.

Our speakers acknowledged the conflict, suffering, fear and



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violence that exists in that part of the world, but they choose to engage with each other on the issue and refuse to give up hope.

The current efforts are not working and, in fact, create increased anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

The situation will not improve by continually blaming the other.

FEAR IS DRIVING FORCE

A driving force is fear, and fear takes on a life of its own. It starts with vilifying the one who wants to kill me or my children. Fear then leads me to vilifying people who might look like or have the same ethnicity or religion of the person I fear. Fear then begins to infect oneself. Fear leads to the abandonment of hope. We then no longer are willing to work for a solution.

Neither the rabbi nor the imam have given up hope.

Even going against the grain of powerful forces, they publicly engage each other and work together seeking to understand the other's narrative and arguing for actions that do not destroy hope.

My hope for the future received a boost last week in Washington, D.C., at the meeting of the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge.

This effort, initiated by President Barack Obama, now involves more than 600 campuses throughout the United States that are committed to interfaith service in the community.

Our next generation has hope, strengthened by their serving together in the community.

One of our speakers was Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Corps. As he did last year while speaking at

three college campuses in Grand Rapids, Patel challenged us with the vision of building a better world.

THE 'WORLD HOUSE'

He reminded us of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech when he received the Noble Prize for Peace in 1964. King told of a famous novelist who had died. Among the writer's papers was a list of suggested story plots, including one in which a widely separated family inherits a beautiful mansion, but on the condition that they have to live together.

King then goes on:

"This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a big house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together — black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews. Catholics and Protestants.

Muslim and Hindu — a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interests, who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other."

Our challenge is to maintain hope. This hope was expressed by our Jewish and Muslim speakers, who are seeking common ground. This is the hope that motivates Patel and motivated King. And it is the hope I see in the students who are inheriting our "world house."

Author and activist Jim Wallis has famously said: "Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change."

Let us join these leaders — as well as the next generation — in action motivated by hope that creates a world of peace.

— *Email interfaith@evsu.edu*