



JP Alert

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Response: Merciful or Merciless?

84 year old French Priest was taken from us by another human being, 19 years old.



On July 26, an 84 year old priest's life was taken by another human being, 19 years old, in France. The 19 year old Adel yelled "You Christians, you kill us." This was another tragic moment of human interaction as these acts of violence continue to repeat themselves. For 15 years, our world has largely been caught up in a "war on terror." Many continue to call for the same strategy of using

overwhelming violence to stop violence. Former French President Sarkozy recently said “[we must be merciless](#)” in our response.

As Catholics, this should ring a bell in us as we are in the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. Who are we? How should we respond? Is it possible to respond with mercy?

It is not easy. That is certain. Yet, we are children of God. A God who shows God’s way in Jesus. A Jesus who calls us to pray for our persecutors, to forgive others, to be ambassadors of reconciliation, and yes, to love our enemies. This is mercy. Jesus makes it possible for us to participate in such mercy.

In fact, it is this way of mercy that heals the wounds of all relationships. Using overwhelming mercy is what overcomes harm and habits of violence. How might we concretize this mercy in effective and faithful ways? Here are a few ways:

A. Humanizing rhetoric and reducing cultural marginalization are essential to defuse the violence and see with clear eyes the path forward to a more just peace.

Although tragic violence has occurred, we must resist the temptation to demonize or de-humanize a particular person or group of actors in the conflict. As we speak out against violence and injustice, we must model a commitment to the human dignity of all people which then undergirds human rights. Calling others evil, barbaric, and declaring their destruction are examples of such de-humanization of both the other and of those speaking.

B. The U.S. government must make finding a **negotiated solution** to the Syria crisis a top diplomatic priority, with all key stakeholders, such as civil society and all willing armed actors included.

C. Humanitarian assistance for people suffering from the brutal impacts of the war is vastly underfunded.

D. Economic pressure needs applied on all armed actors fueling the flames of war.

E. A coordinated strategy for enticing defections from armed groups, such as ISIS, is a key for defusing the violence.

F. Peacebuilding needs increased funding now for trauma-healing, unarmed civilian protection, and nonviolent civilian resistance. *Notably, if this 19 year old went through a substantive restorative justice process instead of simply multiple arrests, surveillance, and house arrest, this particular tragedy would be much less likely to have occurred.

G. Significant reduction in the flow of arms is needed to defuse the capacity and will to rely on violent activity.



Archbishop Dominique Lebrun of Rouen, France who was in Kraków, Poland, for World Youth Day, said he deplored the attacks, adding that “the Catholic Church can’t embrace other weapons than prayer and fraternity among men (humans).” The archbishop, who is on his way back to Rouen, said he was leaving behind in Kraków “hundreds of young people who are the future of humanity” and he said he asked them “not to give in to the violence and become apostles of the civilization of love.”

[Contact President Obama Here](#)

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men’s religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are about 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.

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