

Hate Crimes - 1999

When a stranger resides in your land, you shall not harm him.
(Leviticus 19:33)

Issue

Hate crimes that are perpetrated because of prejudice toward those of a different gender, sexual orientation or disability.

Background

Hate Crimes are defined as acts of violence that are motivated by hatred of persons in a targeted group or because of particular characteristics, such as race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, gender or disability. Most hate crimes are directed at people rather than property. Victims of hate crimes are often severely injured or killed. These violent acts are intended to “keep people in their place,” generate fear and threaten others in the same group. Perpetrators believe they are being threatened and, therefore, are entitled to act violently against others.

Women of Reform Judaism has affirmed through its resolutions its total commitment to the individual right of every person to live in peace without threat or fear of persecution and violence, no matter the gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

Hate crimes have been a regular part of history and unfortunately still occur, not only in the United States, but also throughout the world. Often this violence has been more than a single act and has even led to war. Legislation has been enacted which provides for the prosecuting and stricter sentencing of perpetrators of bias-motivated crimes. However a rash of recent hate crimes has shown the weakness of federal legislation which only covers hate crimes that are perpetrated because of prejudice toward those of a different race, national origin, color or religion occurring in a federally protected activity, such as voting, attending school or working.

Federal legislation is needed to extend the definition of hate crimes to include those of violence that are motivated by the hatred of people of a different gender, perceived sexual orientation or disability. It should also give the federal government a clear mandate to address cases in which local authorities are either unable, unwilling or have no laws to investigate and prosecute bias-motivated violence.

Resolution

In the Jewish ethical tradition that strongly affirms the equality of all people, the importance of human dignity and civil rights and the right to live in peace without the threat of violence, Women of Reform Judaism calls upon all its affiliates to:

- 1) Seek and support legislation at all levels of government which will lead to the investigation and prosecution of bias-motivated crimes: hate crimes against persons because of their gender, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability or any other perceived or real difference.
- 2) Create and/or join community-wide opportunities that stand for and work toward the elimination of hate crimes.
- 3) Provide educational opportunities to explore the origins and dimensions of bias-motivated crimes and ways to combat them.
- 4) Encourage education on human diversity in local schools and religious schools to prevent negative peer pressure and violence and to foster equality, mutual respect and understanding.

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