

A MESSAGE FROM DR SIMON LONGSTAFF AO ON THE BONDI ATTACK

On behalf of everyone who works at The Ethics Centre – our board, staff and volunteers – I am writing to all of our members and supporters to offer our heartfelt sympathy to those affected by the terrorist attack that took place, in Bondi, last night. Some might observe that this is not the biggest atrocity to have taken place in the world this year. However, I do not believe that atrocities should be ranked according to the numbers of people killed and maimed. What defines such events, as evil, lies in the perpetrator's intent to harm people; not because of what they have done, or what they believe – but simply because of who they are.

Last night was not an indiscriminate act of terror. People were targeted merely for being Jewish – men, women, children ... people of every type and description. Whether you lived or died had nothing to do with one's politics or opinions about the world. Simply being Jewish – indeed, simply being in the midst of the Jewish community – was enough for you to be targeted. This was anti-Semitism in its most violent form.

As I write this note, we still do not know what motivated the terrorists. However, nothing can make good what they did – cold-blooded murder can never be justified ... no matter who does the killing, no matter who is the victim, no matter how many reasons are advanced.

Now, I fear that the cycle will take another turn for the worse. Members of other communities will fear that they will be tarred with the same brush as the terrorists – no matter what they have done, no matter what they believe – but simply because of who they are.

Surely, surely it is time to stop this vicious wheel from turning.

At The Ethics Centre, we believe in the intrinsic dignity of all persons – without exception. This recognition has no boundaries and, difficult as it may be, must extend even to those who visit terror upon us. At times like this, we should embrace our common humanity – and not give way to those who would stoke and exploit divisions for their own ends.

Many people will be hurting today – even if far removed from the carnage. Many will be angry or confused, or feeling helpless or just numb. I think I have felt all of those emotions since the tragic events of last evening began to unfold. However, in the midst of all of this, we can hold onto the fact that what happens next is not inevitable. Our governments will take the lead in providing security – but only we, the people, can create the conditions of 'belonging' in which every person can feel safe in the warm embrace of a society that recognises the intrinsic dignity of all. In this, let's not forget the bravery of those who confronted the gunmen, who rendered first aid, who comforted the dying or offered sanctuary within their homes. These people show what is possible when the good in us comes forth. Making and sustaining just such a society – even in the face of terror – is what each of us can do. I hold onto that – and in the midst of pain and confusion hope you might do the same.

The Ethics Centre is a not-for-profit organisation designed to bring ethics to the centre of personal and professional life. Dr Simon Longstaff AO is The Ethics Centre's Executive Director.