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More action needed on anniversary of Sikh temple shooting

BY SUMAN RAGHUNATHAN

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This week marks the second anniversary of the Oak Creek, Wis., Sikh temple tragedy, and reminds us we need to do more as a nation to prevent hate crimes and the destruction they wreak upon the fabric of communities.

On Aug. 5, 2012, Wade Michael Page, a lone gunman long associated with white supremacist groups, killed six worshippers.

The residents of Oak Creek have made tremendous progress toward healing by working to bring the community together for an inspiring annual run and walk on the anniversary of the tragedy. The event, which remains focused on moving the community forward, brings together a diverse cross section of people that is truly reflective of our nation: Sikh-Americans, South Asians, Caucasians, African-Americans and Latinos.

Unfortunately, terrible events such as the one at the temple two years ago continue to occur across the nation, and appear to be on the rise.

Part of the problem is xenophobic rhetoric that views South Asians, including Muslims and Sikh-Americans, as separate from the American mainstream, as unwelcome here, or even as terrorists simply by virtue of their appearance. At South Asian Americans Leading Together, we have found that xenophobic rhetoric has increased over the past several years.

Some public figures continue to raise troubling and unfounded questions about the allegiance of South Asians, Arabs and Muslim-Americans to the United States.

This rhetoric must stop: It is un-American to its core. It divides us and our communities at a time when it's more important than ever that we come together as a nation in all of our rich diversity.

By 2040, the majority of Americans will come from communities of color. And we are, after all, a nation of immigrants. That's why hate crimes against Sikhs, South Asians, Muslim-Americans and Arab-Americans have been so disturbing.

It's also why the virulent opposition to the unaccompanied immigrant children seeking refuge in the United States has been so shocking.

These mean-spirited sentiments do little to reassure South Asian, Latino and other immigrant communities that they are truly welcome here in their new homes.

We need to redeem the promise of America as a haven for all people who are striving to be free.

And we need our local, state and federal governments to ensure that all of our communities feel truly safe and welcome here in America.

The residents of Oak Creek and of Sikh and South Asian communities across the United States deserve that, if nothing else.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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