

## IFFA Response to hate crimes and violence

The madness continues, and we feel powerless. For decades, we have watched as the rhetoric of hate and conspiracy theories has grown and intensified with increased violence close on its heels. The denunciations from religious and spiritual leaders, news media, most politicians, cultural icons, etc. seemingly have made little difference.

But is that true? The almost universal condemnation of hatred and violence kept the radical hate groups on the fringes. Their message was more often whispered than spoken out loud. People hid their membership in or support of those groups. But, things are different now. Some politicians openly encourage hatred and intolerance against minorities, non-Christian religions, immigrants, and anyone who disagree with them. No one should be surprised that violence and intimidation against those minorities surged. Anti-Semitic incidents have increased 57% in just the last year. As Karen Tumulty said in the Sunday, Oct. 28 Washington Post, the massacre in Pittsburgh was not unimaginable; it was inevitable.

We can no longer retreat into feelings of helplessness that leads us to do nothing. We must speak up when we hear someone make disparaging remarks about individuals or groups based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or whatever. The same applies to comments on social media. We must call them out every time. EVERY TIME! We must be open in expressing our views that diversity is our strength. We must break out of our bubbles to interact with and get to know people of other faiths and ethnicities. Come to the Interfaith Fellowship's public forums. Visit the house of worship of another faith. We must inject the moral values on which all of our religions are based back into the public discussion. We must drive the hate and fear mongers back to their dark corners rather than giving them equal prominence in the legitimate news media. We must reclaim the America of decency and inclusiveness and belief in the future.

**WE ARE NOT POWERLESS!** It's time we started acting like it.

Andy Reese  
IFFA President