

New Zealand's tragedy sends a strong message on gun control

The horrific acts played out inside the peaceful mosques of Christchurch, and the way they were broadcast to the outside world, is right up there with 9/11 and ISIS on most people's scale of evil. In the eyes of the perpetrator and his followers it was a job well done!

But if we wish to take some solace from such a heart-rending situation, New Zealanders did use the occasion to crack down hard on the availability of guns within their peace-loving community. Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, a leader acclaimed for her positive thinking, was the right person at the right time to make this happen.

Time after time we have seen similar, man-made atrocities, enacted by fanatics of all creeds, in North America and many other places. Often little is done after the event to limit the same sort of thing happening again. Sometimes there are exceptions, such as in Norway, after the 2011 shooting, but usually, particularly in the United States, band-aid remedies are applied to major wounds.

In the USA, a gun culture exists, supported by the powerful National Rifle Association, which is abhorrent to most other peace-loving nations (though strangely, New Zealand also has inadequate gun laws, with about 1.5 million guns in the public domain for less than 5 million people). The NRA's slogan *'It's not just about guns, it's about freedom'* says it all, in terms of tunnel-vision towards the horrific and regular shootings that occur across the country.

Terrorists come in many different forms, the Christchurch gunman following the creed of white supremacy; something which, along with slavery, should have long since been consigned to the dustbin of history. But the one thing that terrorists have in common,

despite their religious or political leanings, is that they need a weapon to carry out their attack. These weapons can be as diverse as a knife, or a truck, or even a plane, but more-often-than-not, their weapon of choice is a gun. Thus, it would seem common sense that the availability of guns, especially semi-automatic varieties, should be severely curtailed. This is the task that Jacinda Ardern was able to manage, with bipartisan support from the New Zealand parliament, thus creating a unified response to a truly horrendous crime.

But to restrict this crime and any possible response to New Zealand, would be to do the people that died in Christchurch a severe injustice. Prime Minister Ardern has been forthright on many other topics before now; something of a clear-thinking head in an opaque world. This time after setting the example at home, she now has the credibility to say to the rest of the world:

“We make these changes, in true respect for those that died, and to show to the rest of the world that it is possible for a government to act with strength and sincerity, to restrict guns, as a major means of tackling terrorism, and in so doing, protect the community.”

But of course, it's not only physical access to guns that needs to be dealt with. As a young parent, in the 1980s and 90s, I was vilified by friends and neighbours for restricting my children's access to anything and everything related to guns; even water-pistols were barred! My thinking was that there's a whole feeder industry, if you like, that contributes to the gun culture. Children grow up with guns as the norm in cartoons on TV, or via their Play-Station boxes, then graduate to films where role models brandish guns as if they were lollipops and blood splatters everywhere like ketchup. It seemed to me at the time, not a great way to educate kids, and now 20 or 30 years down the line, I think my children strongly respect and reflect my views on this.

Now, a fifth of the way into the 20th Century, our globe-spanning internet and ubiquitous social media platforms exist as additional weapons for gunmen and terrorists to use to

support their warped thinking and monstrous acts. This was clearly an additional factor which played a key part in the Christchurch massacre. Both these arms of media are forked tongues in many respects, developed by right-minded people for the benefit of millions all around our planet, but abused and misused for darker purposes by terrorists, crime syndicates and single-minded crackpots.

How we tackle this abduction of modern technology for criminal purposes is an even bigger challenge than restricting and reducing the proliferation of guns. But of course, curbing the availability of guns and tackling the dark side of our present-day communication systems can all be done if we have the right leaders and the strength of conviction within our societies to do it.

After Christchurch, New Zealand took a step in the right direction, which might not have happened were it not for the right-mindedness and resolve of their young, female leader. We need more trailblazers around the world with the determination of Jacinda Ardern, who can lead their constituencies to redress the darker sides of society – which exist as an increasingly powerful minority - on behalf of the light-sided majority.
