



THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

CREATION OF A TASK FORCE ON TERRORISM

*Addressing the Challenges Posed by Terrorism in the World:
Can Psychology Help Find a Path to Peace?*

PROPOSAL

Submitted to
the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors
by
Janel Gauthier
July 2016

INTRODUCTION

Terrorist attacks resulting in human casualties have become a common occurrence. Nowadays, it seems that hardly a day goes by when we do not hear of another violent terrorist attack somewhere in the world. Over the last six months alone, there have been literally hundreds of terrorist attacks around the world. Factor out the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria and you still have dozens of attacks involving suicide bombing, car bombing, shooting, and execution. Some are widely covered by media, but many go unnoticed.

Typical responses of governments to terrorist attacks involve going after terrorists; beefing up control and security; increasing investments in anti-terror measures; cooperating better in sharing of information and intelligence; and taking measures to prevent and stop the financing of terrorism, terrorist organizations and individual terrorists. Whether or not these responses have yielded any benefits in terms of thwarting terrorism over time is open to debate. This is not to say, of course, that some of these strategies have not helped to catch or kill some terrorists before they inflict harm on innocent people. However, if one goes by what is reported in the media, it is difficult to see that progress has been made in eradicating world violence and terrorism.

Violence and terrorism are profoundly changing the world we live in, affecting our effectiveness, security and well-being. A better understanding of what spurs violence and terrorism in today's world is needed to curb terrorism. As the leading association of applied psychology in the world, IAAP has a role to play and a challenge to meet.

TERRORISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

Terrorism is not a new problem. It has been part of the world since the early ages of humanity. However, despite how old terrorism is, scientific research on this topic is fairly new.

Determining what drives people to terrorism is no easy task. For one thing, terrorists are not likely to volunteer as experimental subjects, and examining their activities from afar can lead to erroneous conclusions. What's more, one group's terrorist is another group's freedom fighter.

Given these complexities, the psychology of terrorism is marked more by theory and opinion than by good science. But a number of psychologists have started to study terrorism, and a body of knowledge pointing to various determinants of terrorism is emerging. Still, if we are to eradicate terrorism, the work of psychologists in trying to understand human behaviour in general and terrorist behaviour in particular needs to be intensified, failing which the world can see more destruction.

New approaches based on scientific research and understanding of human nature and politics need to be developed to thwart terrorism. Our continuous existence as a species on this planet now depends on how we act in relationship to ourselves, to other persons and peoples, and to nature. Better approaches for managing interpersonal, intercultural, and international affairs are needed. Concrete and integrated actions must be undertaken to move forward. Hence the present proposal.

A TASK FORCE ON TERRORISM

In 2006, a task force on terrorism was established under the leadership of IAAP President Michael Knowles (2006-2010). The initial suggestion to form a task force on terrorism was made by Professor Sarlito Sarwono, the Director of the Institute of Psychological Research, Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia. It arose as a result of the programming of a symposium on terrorism as part of the Scientific Program of the inaugural Asian Psychological Association (APsyA) Conference in Bali in 2006, which was co-sponsored by IAAP, the International Council of Psychologists, and Division 52 (International Psychology) of the American Psychological Association. Chaired by Prof. Sarlito Sarwono, the Task Force submitted two reports to the IAAP Board of Directors: one in Berlin in 2008 and another one in Melbourne in 2010. It also succeeded in bringing together in a symposium it convened for the 2010 ICAP a number of experts who were on top of their field. However, this work did not continue when President Raymond Fowler assumed the IAAP presidency in 2010 and, consequently, the opportunity to keep abreast of what occurs in the world of terrorism and make a substantial contribution to a much better understanding of terrorism and its various aspects were lost.

It is imperative that a task force on terrorism be re-created. IAAP was founded in 1920 to promote the science and practice of applied psychology and to facilitate interaction and communication among applied psychologists around the world. With 18 divisions and some 3,500 members from over 80 countries, IAAP is uniquely and ideally positioned to help resolve societal problems, create just societies, and eliminate global threats to human existence. As the leading international organization in the field of applied psychology, IAAP can – and must – play a key role in addressing the problem of violence and terrorism in our contemporary world. It has the collective knowledge and expertise to meet the challenge and help build a more peaceful and harmonious world.

*Janel Gauthier
President of IAAP
July 2016*

*Terrorism poses challenge to humanity
and those believing in humanity should collectively fight it.
(Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, March 31, 2016)*

IAAP TASK FORCE ON TERRORISM

*Addressing the Challenges Posed by Terrorism in the World:
Can Psychology Help Find a Path to Peace?*

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Rationale

Violence and terrorism are profoundly changing the world we live in, affecting our effectiveness, security and well-being. A better understanding of what spurs violence and terrorism in today's world is needed to develop more effective approaches to thwart violence and terrorism in the world.

Aim

The primary aim of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) Task Force on Terrorism will be to engage members of the psychology community (teachers, researchers, practitioners, and students) in the issue of terrorism.

Mandate

The mandate of the IAAP Task Force on Terrorism will be to report on the contributions of psychological research to the understanding of psychological dimensions of terrorism, provide research and policy recommendations for psychological science, and propose actions that IAAP could or should take to assist psychologists' engagement with the issue of terrorism.

Tasks

To fulfill its mandate, the Task Force will:

1. Summarize research illustrating a psychologically informed understanding of terrorism in terms of its causes, impacts and remedies;
2. Formulate research and policy recommendations for psychological science to address the issues of terrorism;
3. Make recommendations to the IAAP Board of Directors as to what actions IAAP should take to enlist psychologists in the fight against terrorism and play an enduring and expanding role in helping humanity to find a path to peace.

Procedure

One face-to-face (in person) meeting;
Other deliberations by electronic means (e-mail, Skype / Zoom, teleconference, etc.).

Composition

Chair appointed by IAAP President plus two or three additional participants selected by the Chair of the Task Force in consultation with the President.

Timeline

Work to begin in October 2016;
Final report to be submitted by January 31st, 2018.