

National Black Church Initiative

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June 10, 2009

Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
United States Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Honorable Secretary Janet Napolitano Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security Washington, DC 20528

Dear Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. and Secretary Janet Napolitano:

The National Black Church Initiative would like to request some time with you, your staff and the appropriate personnel to discuss the escalating issue of violence in and towards religious institutions in America. No matter where one is located killing is unacceptable, but the recent rash of killings within religious institutions is especially disturbing to both those of faith and those without. This trend is a serious sign that religion is now an institution that is at risk from violence from those looking to strike fear amongst the most vulnerable target, thus underlining their contempt for civil as well as religious law. Religious institutions have emerged as the next target of domestic terrorism and should be considered at high risk from attacks.

One can easily dismiss the fact that this may be a sociological response to the downward trend in the economy by noting the domestic terrorism attacks cited below against religious institutions came at a time when the economy was at its peak level. Therefore, the statistics clearly note that the economy is not the cause, and that religious institutions are becoming a target of domestic terrorism because of multiple sociological causes. One of the major causes is the fact that many religious institutions offer the perpetrator a soft target, but also a target that will automatically give them maximum visibility for whatever cause they are hoping to get attention directed towards.

Religion has emerged as the 21st century's Achilles heel in society. Ever since the 1980s and the emergence of the religious right, religion has created a political culture that determines whether one is for or against abortion, same sex marriage, morality, and other emotional and divisive issues. This is especially noticeable within the confines of presidential politics and the now close religious ties that the political establishment feels they need to gain the "religious vote."

It has become far too polarizing and with the high visibility of religious rhetoric a domestic terrorist can easily see religious groups or symbols as high value targets that will make a statement of purpose whatever distorted concept of statement that drives them to violence.

The National Black Church Initiative issued a major press release on this subject matter on March 10, 2009 noting the shooting of a pastor in his pulpit. Just this past weekend we once again noted the killing of abortion doctor George Tiller inside a religious community. Again, this verifies our original claim that those seeking to harm will meet little to no resistance because of the universal welcoming of most religious institutions.

These two killings do not stand alone in recent history as murders within faith-based communities have been occurring regularly and often throughout the past ten years. The list below highlights only a few of the recent killings that have occurred inside what are supposed to be houses of worship. Now it is evident that the religious communities, law enforcement and the Justice Department must take the claim that these communities are becoming a venue for domestic terrorists seriously.

- March 8, 2009: Rev. Fred Winters is shot in his Southern Illinois church by an unknown assailant who then proceeded to stab to members of his congregation.
- August 12, 2007: A lone gunman, Eiken Elam Saimon, opened fire in a Missouri Micronesian church, killing a pastor and two other churchgoers.
- May 20, 2007: A standoff between police and a suspect in the shootings of three people in a Moscow, Idaho, Presbyterian Church ended with three dead, including one police officer.
- Although not at a church building, the Oct. 2, 2006, attack in Lancaster County, Pa., by a gunman who killed five girls and then himself at an Amish school targeted a religious site.
- May 21, 2006: Louisiana. Four were killed by a man at Jesus Christ Church.
- Feb. 26, 2006: Michigan. Two people were killed at Zion Hope Missionary Baptist Church by a man who reportedly went to the church looking for his girlfriend. He later killed himself.
- April 9, 2005: A 27-year-old airman died after being shot at a church in College Park, Ga., where he had once worked as a security guard.
- March 12, 2005: A man walked into the services of the Living Church of God in Milwaukee and open fired immediately, killing seven people.
- Oct. 5, 2003: A woman opened fire in Turner Monumental AME church in Kirkwood, east of Atlanta, killing the pastor and two others.
- Sept. 16, 1999: Seven young people were killed when a man opened fire during a prayer service for teen-agers at the Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

In light of the report prepared by Homeland Security on right wing extremist organization, the election of Barack Obama as our first African American President and the recent shooting at the National Holocaust museum in Washington D.C. of Stephen T. John, an African American security guard, by a known white supremacist, the above shootings are even more concerning and

in this context only further confirm our concerns. Let us also not forget the 50 African American churches that were burned down, it was also not so long ago that African American churches were being bombed in the 1950's and 60's. This constitutes a disturbing pattern of violence against religious organizations.

These five national ministries that are cited below are but part of a long list of high risk targets within the religious community that loans itself to, what we believe, is the emergence of religion as a potential domestic terrorist target.

Rev. Joel Osteen Ministries - Houston, TX
T.D. Jakes/The Potter House – Dallas, TX
Riverside Baptist Church – New York, NY
The National Cathedral – Washington, DC
Ebenezer Baptist Church – Atlanta, GA

As many know, Ms. Alberta King, wife of Martin Luther King Sr. -- better known as Daddy King -- and the mother of Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in Ebenezer Baptist Church while sitting at the organ by Marcus Wayne Chenault, who stated that he shot King because "all Christians are my enemies." If you contrast this in relationship to the rash of shootings today one should be quite disturbed. This is why the NBCI issued a warning to religious organizations across the country that they must take security seriously. Given the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and the tension that exists between the West and the Arab nations along with the increased homegrown terrorist acts among those who hold to extreme religious views, we believe that this is a powder keg that is waiting to explode. It will not be long before suicide bombers begin to invade religious settings in America. As you well know this has repeatedly happened in Iraq where Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects repeatedly have attacked each other's religious mosques. We are desperately trying to head off such acts from occurring within the United States in any and all religious settings. We do not want to cause alarm, but as responsible national clerics we must begin to raise this issue.

Here is what we propose. There should be a high level meeting with the appropriate officials and high level religious officials to discuss this issue and all of its ramifications. NBCI, along with others, will work with the administration to call such a meeting. In addition, NBCI, working with the proper authorities at Homeland Security and the Justice Department, would like to create educational materials (literature, video, and websites) to assist faith communities on how to properly construct and create a security blanket around their religious congregations for the explicit purpose of protecting and detecting any potential harm. We believe that this must be done in a prudent way that does not alarm the general public nor religious institutions, but does provide them with the necessary technical assistance to make sure that these institutions are properly protected against any domestic or foreign terrorism.

We are looking forward to talking about this more with you and the proper administrative officials. In the meantime we plan to provide a copy of this communication to all major religious organizations to alert them of these forthcoming discussions. I plan to designate one of our faith

command leaders to work with me in providing whatever assistance is necessary to make this a reality.

Sincerely,

The Right Most Rev. Anthony Evans
President