#WeAreOne

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On Thanksgiving, an anti-Hindu hate crime occurred in Woodhaven. Over 40 jhandi flags were burned in the front yard of a Hindu home.

Jhandi flags are customarily raised at the culmination of Indo-Caribbean Hindu prayer rituals and are representative of various Hindu deities. These flags are arguably the biggest identifier of Hindu Indo-Caribbean homes in New York City. They represent some of the core tenets of Hinduism; among them peace, love, and friendship. This incident was a blatant attack against the Hindu faith, but more so, against humanity. The incident also raised the ongoing question of how Islamophobia is impacting our community. Hatred towards all those who 'look like terrorists' is spreading all over the world. People are now resistant to making any public demonstrations of their faith for fear of being victims of hate crimes or violence.

When I called the 102nd Precinct to obtain more information on the pending investigation of the crime, I discovered that, contrary to what some media outlets had indicated, the crime was thankfully being handled as a hate crime by the NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force. The precinct's Community Affairs Unit was incredibly receptive and open to dialogue, even supporting the idea to raise awareness about the incident through a rally. Upon a visit to the victimized family's home, the family members were similarly supportive, though visibly shaken by the thought that, had the jhandi flags been leaning against their house, they could have all been killed.

With the go ahead from both the NYPD and the victims, Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus, joined by elected officials, Hindu leaders, community organizers, and faith-based leaders, held the #WeAreOne rally at the corner of 89thAvenue and 80th Street in communities is absolutely unconscionable – here in the most diverse city in the world, we cannot tolerate hate crimes of any sort," said New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer. "Crimes which target religious expression are hate crimes, and should be treated as such," said New York City Council Member Eric Ulrich. "Whoever is responsible for the burning of these flags must be held accountable. We simply strong message that this type of hatred will not be tolerated in our community."

Many community activists partnered with Sadhana to organize the rally and have condemned the hate crime as an intolerable one. "We are a diverse, tolerant and peaceful community. We're coming together and taking a public stand to condemn this hateful act because it is both unusual and unacceptable," said Richard be addressed strongly by the authorities."

Organizations that serve New York City's Indo-Caribbean population also spoke out. Kenrick Ross, Executive Director of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance said, "As we promote multicultural dialogue and foster tolerance and understanding, let us also be mindful that the onus is not on minorities, immigrants, and communities of color to justify why they should be treat-

In as much as this is a community concern, it is also one that strikes at the hearts of Hindus across America and worldwide. Various Hindu groups, both national and local, expressed their concerns for the victimized family and called for justice. "Hopefully, this rally shines a much needed light on bias motivated attacks on Hindus in New York City and across the country. HAF stands with Sadhana and the greater Hindu family of New York, particularly our Guyanese and Trinidadian brothers and sisters, in making sure that this crime doesn't get ignored by local and federal law enforcement agencies," said Murali Balaji, Director of Education and Curriculum Reform of the nationwide advocacy organization Hindu American Foundation. Dr. Uma Mysorekar, President of one of the largest Hindu temples in the country, the Hindu Temple Society of North America said, "It is with great concern and sorrow that our community has come to know of the unfortunate incident of burning of several jhandi flags, the religious symbol of our Indo-Caribbean Hindu friends in our Woodhaven neighborhood, particularly during the Thanksgiving time."

Over 40 jhandi flags were burned on Thanksgiving Day in Woodhaven, Queens. (Photo Credit: Robert Stridoron).

Woodhaven, Queens on Friday, December 4, to promote peace and denounce hate-based crimes and violence. Several elected officials sent statements in advance of the rally denouncing the hate crime and expressing the need to make New York City a safe, tolerant, and peaceful place to live. "This attack on the Hindu and Indo-Caribbean cannot tolerate any form of religious persecution."

New York State Assembly Member Michael Miller stated, "When I received news that someone had burned more than three dozen religious flags on Thanksgiving morning, I was in disbelief to hear that it happened so close to home. I want to condemn the actions of this individual and ask everyone of all faiths in our community come together in solidarity against any form of flag burning such as what happened here in Woodhaven." New York State Senator James Sanders Jr. said: "It is sad and disheartening that here in Queens, the city's most diverse borough, some callous individual would burn 40 jhandi flags outside of a Woodhaven home…I want to send a David, member of Community Board 9. "Despite the fact our numbers are significant, we need to be vigilant, united, and focused," said Vishnu Mahadeo, President of the Richmond Hill Economic Development Council. He continued by saying, "When our tradition, culture, or religion is degraded and abused, we must seek corrective actions and justice." Chuck Mohan, President of the Guyanese American Workers United said, "An injury to one, is an injury to all, and everyone in the community should feel violated and disrespected; whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jews, Christians etc." Lakshmee Singh, talk show host from Let's Talk with Lakshmee said that, "Intolerant and despicable acts against Hindus must ed with basic fairness, dignity, and respect. It is rather on all of us, particularly public figures, to make sure that we create environments which are inclusive, tolerant, and supportive." As news articles about the hate crime were circulated on social media, some recommended that jhandi flags be removed from the front of homes and placed in backyards instead. Simone Jhingoor, co-founder of women's empowerment group Jahajee Sisters said, "Whether this heinous act was meant to be anti-Hindu or anti-Muslim, the perpetrators of such hate violence send a loud message. Yet, we also send a message: we are standing up as a community in solidarity against this act of hate. We refuse to live in fear."

Over the course of the last few weeks, our world has had to cope with many atrocities: from the Paris attacks to the San Bernandino, California shootings. At the #WeAreOne rally, attendees took a stand against all hate-based acts. It is simply not enough to pray. We need to rekindle the light of love in the hearts of the world. It is always good to start at home.

"As we promote multicultural dialogue and foster tolerance and understanding, let us also be mindful that the onus is not on minorities, immigrants, and communities of color to justify why they should be treated with basic fairness, dignity, and respect. It is rather on all of us, particularly public figures, to make sure that we create environments which are inclusive, tolerant, and supportive," says Kenrick Ross, Executive Director of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance.