

# 100 WORDS

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*Voice of the victims of terrorism*

AMSTERDAM, JUNE 30, 2009

The testimonials, the voice of the victims,  
in 100 words the impact of what they lived through.

**Theme: social cohesion and terrorism**

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## colophon

Impact, Dutch knowledge & advice center for post-disaster psychosocial care  
Meibergdreef 5  
1105 AZ Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
T +31 (0)20 5662 102  
[www.impact-kenniscentrum.nl](http://www.impact-kenniscentrum.nl)

## design

Burobraak, Arjan Braaksma, Samuel Pernicha  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

# VNET

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“VNet: The Voice of the Victims in Europe” aims to provide the necessary framework for the exchange of different experiences, emotions, demands and testimonials of victims of terrorism in the European Union.

We want to raise awareness in European society, and we work to achieve a real improvement of the legal, social and psychological support to victims of terrorism and to achieve a real improvement of the status of victims of terrorism.

European laws should meet the real needs of victims of terrorism, and as a necessary step to achieve these goals, the Voice of the Victims should be heard. The European Network of the Victims of terrorism should become a solid and efficient speaker with the European Commission and with the member States.

**European Network Voice of the Victims**

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# IMPACT

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Impact is the Dutch knowledge & advice center for post-disaster psychosocial care. The objective of Impact is encouraging high quality and well-organised post-disaster psychosocial care. Impact’s goal is to compile experience and scientific knowledge, making it available to and meaningful for a variety of target groups including victims and victim organisations and promoting cooperation between the parties involved.

Since 9/11, the Bali-bombings, M 11 and July 7, terrorism has become a major perceived threat in the lives of Europeans. Therefore Impact compiled a lot of knowledge on the consequences of terrorism on victims, made it concrete in fact sheets for victims and professionals, and started the EU-funded project ‘Citizens & Resilience, the balance between awareness and fear’. Impact developed a document for professional relief workers about what to do after a terrorist attack. For children specific material was developed: a musical and teaching material on how to cope with threats. Impact has developed a format for a public campaign with a symbol of psychological counterterrorism: a light. The symbol was launched in 2007 to support the commemoration day, The European Day for Victims of Terrorism, that unites Europeans and fosters solidarity within the European Community, in cooperation with VNet.

Impact participates in VNet to empathise with the victims of terrorism, to make the professional EU-network available for victims and victim-organisations and to support them with services based on the latest scientific knowledge, best practices and newly developed products.

**Impact, the Dutch knowledge & advice centre for post-disaster psychosocial care**

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# SOCIAL COHESION AND TERRORISM

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## **Social cohesion is a basic European value**

The “Founding fathers of Europe” sought to enhance social cohesion among citizens, making tolerance and respect basic European values. These are also key features of social cohesion. Terrorism aims to undermine these values and is therefore a major threat to social cohesion.

## **The workings of terrorism**

Terrorism enforces the creation of in- and out-groups: ‘us and them’. Social cohesion is threatened by the collective exclusion of out-group members - often based on trivial criteria.

## **Challenges for (opinion) leaders**

Labelling terrorism in terms of a clash between ingroup and outgroup civilizations has a dramatic impact on cohesion (e.g. “you are either with us or with the terrorists”). This only helps terrorists to achieve their goal. Communication should, instead, be focused on starting a dialogue.

*“They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind”*

**Frans Willem Winkel**  
Professor in Victimology

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# ONE HEART

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One Heart Global is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping victims of terror with their long-term psychological and physical recovery. It has been founded by Sarri Singer and Jakob Kimchy, both victims of terrorism. They have shared their impressive, emotional and very personal stories, not only considering the direct impact of the actual events, but also its effect on their relationship with society.

*“Our vision is to bring victims of terrorism from around the world to the same table. To listen. To help. And also to cry. One Heart Global is dedicated to educate society and to help them understand what is behind the words ‘victim of terror’.”*

**One Heart Global Foundation**

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*“I boarded the number 14 bus which was very full. I saw two empty seats in the front section and decided to sit down, but instead of taking the aisle seat, like I normally would have, I moved in next to the window, a choice that I know if I hadn’t made I would not be here today.*

*I screamed so loud that a stranger heard my cries and ran toward the mangled bus and pulled me out.*

*I will never forget the kindness and love that was shown to me by those whom I had never met.*

*After personally going through a terrorist attack, I found that society as a whole initially is very sympathetic. But after the media fades, society goes about their lives while victims are still dealing with the long-term effects.*

*There is not a day that goes by that I do not suffer pain and anguish from what was supposed to be a short bus ride to meet a friend for dinner and ended up being one of Israel’s largest bus bombings.*


*Terrorism does not discriminate – it can happen anywhere at anytime and it is not just our responsibility as victims or those that work with victims, but it needs to be the responsibility of governments, organizations and communities to bring about social cohesion.”*

**SARRI SINGER**

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“There is a tremendous need for strong social responsibility in society for victims of terrorism.”

A man with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark suit, a light-colored shirt, and a striped tie, is speaking into a microphone. He is standing at a podium, and his hands are clasped around the microphone. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a stage or event setting. The overall lighting is warm and slightly dim.

“-I’m sorry, but your father was killed today—the professor told me.”

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*“I had the honor to know my father for almost 25 years. My father was a sensitive, warm, kind, loving man, with beautiful blue eyes and a big, big smile.*

*He taught me that we need to help those who can’t help themselves. He always welcomed people with a smile. He had a lot of patience, was a good listener and always gave his best advice to who ever asked for it. And people did.*

*I can’t even describe in words how hard it is to live every day without my father and to know how he was murdered. It is a nightmare that has no end.*

*But despite all this pain, our enemy should know that they can’t break our spirit and soul. Forever, we will stand proud with our values for life, freedom and love.*

*The Israeli society is very involved in giving help to terror victims.*

*But the question is – How can there be social cohesion when there is not a complete understanding for the needs of terror victims?*

*Society needs to realize that someone who has lost a family member in a terrorist attack or was injured can be dealing with trauma for many years.*

*We didn’t choose to be victims, we didn’t choose to be under attack or to lose a family member, but it’s in our hands to improve the cohesion between victims and society.”*

**JACOB KIMCHY**

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# CHALLENGES

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## **What is needed to maximise the impact of the victim's voice**

The question how victims and their representatives can contribute to social cohesion is a difficult one to answer. A variety of answers was given during the group discussions. Several of the elements mentioned by the delegates from different countries, are considered necessary at every thinkable scale level, ranging from local to international communities:

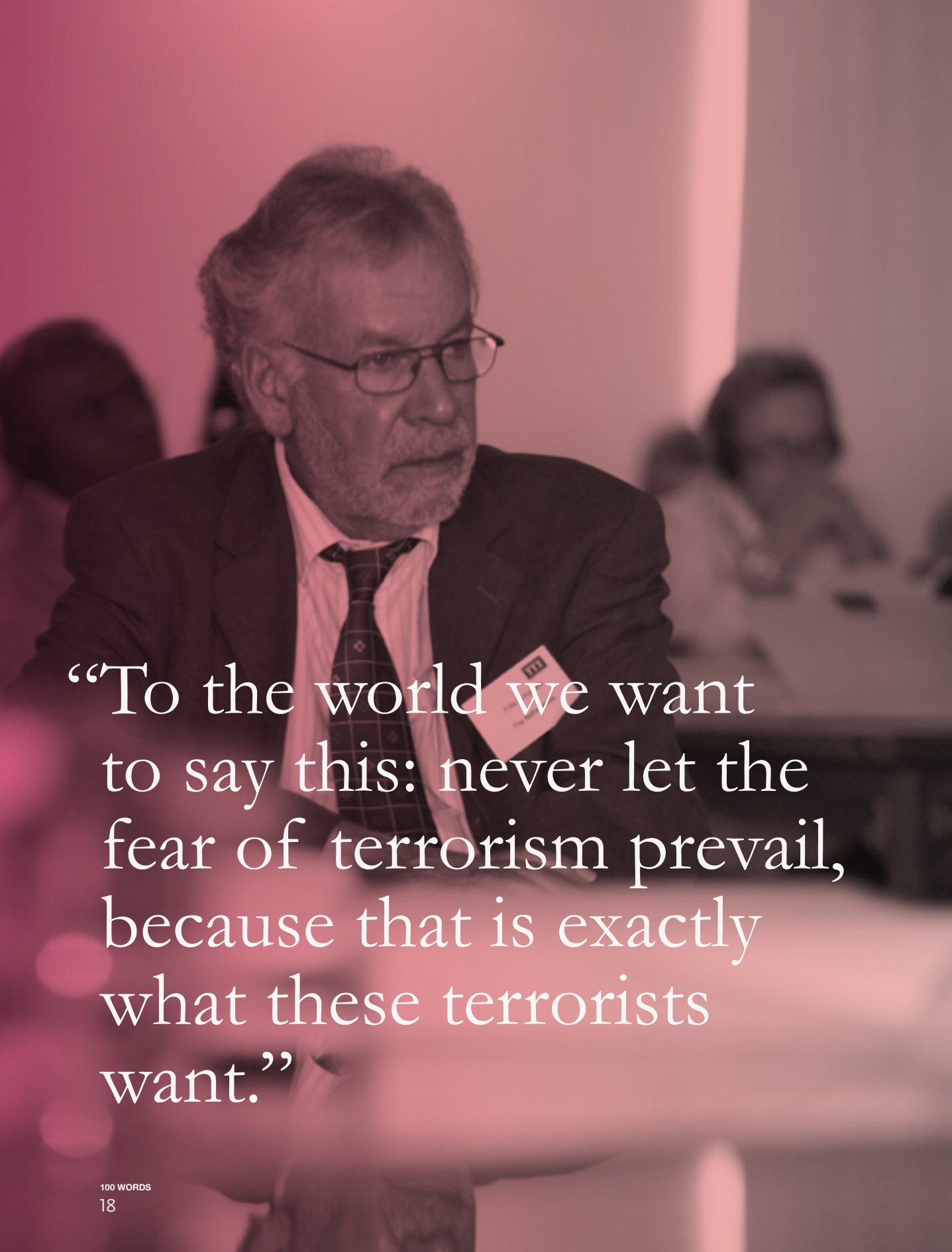
- victim involvement or participation in networks
- raising media attention, creating public awareness
- acknowledgement and responsibility taken by governments; focus on victims, not only on perpetrators
- education on trauma and support, on listening to the victim's voice
- equal treatment and access to support for all victims

There are important challenges any society must overcome to fully make use of the potential the victim's voice has to offer. The voice must be positioned within society, it must be remembered. Ways must be found to try and connect to people. Make them understand trauma and how people are affected by it. Listen to victims and disseminate and sustain the lessons we can draw from them. Providing assistance on the short term is absolutely necessary yet, make sure that support is maintained on the longer term. Still, one fundamental challenge remains: oppose to the definition of in- and out-groups.

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“To the world we want to say this: never let the fear of terrorism prevail, because that is exactly what these terrorists want.”

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Two hundred and two people died in the Bali-bombings of Saturday the 12th of October 2002; among them, the son and daughter-in-law of Frits Schippers. His life and that of his family changed forever. It took over two months before the bodies of their loved ones were identified and they got certainty about what had happened to them.

Emotional and practical support from family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances was great. The attention from the media and the government, however, faded as it turned out there were not many Dutch casualties.

In listing the Al Qaeda attacks, the Bali-bombings are often forgotten.

*“We had the feeling that the Bali-bombings had only small importance, that the Bali-victims received no acknowledgement.”*

**FRITS SCHIPPERS**

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“It is difficult to deal with your own grief and pressure the government to act.”



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On the 3rd of June, 1984, Michael Gallagher's youngest brother, who had joined the Security Forces, was killed in an IRA ambush. At the time, Michael Gallagher thought that was the worst thing that could ever happen to him. Unfortunately, fate struck again. On the 15th of August, 1998, his only son of just 21 was killed by a car bomb, placed by the Real IRA in the city of Omagh, Northern Ireland. Though never politically involved, the proceedings of the two criminal investigations spurred Michael Gallagher to become co-founder of Omagh Support. The truth about the terrorist attack had to be told.

A problem in getting support from the community in which he lived was that it supported the republican ideology. Consequently, the community had difficulty accepting the fact that the families of victims started questioning many things that had been handled badly.

*“The friends you had before are often not the friends you have after, because they don't understand what you are going through.”*

**MICHAEL GALLAGHER**

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Returning from a mission in Tanzania, Annick Perrine's husband became a victim of terrorism when on the 6th of April, 1994, terrorists shot down the airplane he shared with the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi at the time. Mr. Perrine was killed.

Support from family, friends and colleagues, but also from the government was great in the beginning. However, today – 15 years after the event – many problems remain unsolved, support for the families and their efforts is decreasing, and critique from the press is growing. This has led to an increased feeling of isolation. There is an important role for victim organisations to create understanding.

*“An organisation of victims can prevent trivialisation of what has happened and continue the long-term remembrance, which will create bonds within the community.”*

## **ANNICK PERRINE**

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“Different people who lived through similar situations. This creates a bond within society.”

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On the 11th of March 2004, Eloy Morán De La Fuente became a victim of the terrorist attack in Madrid. It was important for him to join the organisation that was established to help people like him who were on the train that was bombed. Not just to provide them with support, but also to make sure that justice will be done; a crucial element for victims.

The sense of compassion and support from Spanish society was great. The citizens of Madrid did not want to forget this attack. But still, a discrepancy exists between the experience of the victims and the understanding of the wider population.

*“The citizens cannot understand what we have been through, neither can the government which represents us, which is why we do not have the same concerns and not all available means are used to obtain justice.”*

**ELOY MORÁN DE LA FUENTE**

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“We were all on that train”



“There is a collective will in society to forget. They want you to move on.”

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In the 1960's Antonio Iosa founded the cultural association Carlo Perini on the outskirts of Milan. Through this association Antonio Iosa tried to stimulate dialogue and discussion between the different groups of people living in that area. Unfortunately, his work was not appreciated by all, resulting in an assault by the Red Brigade on April 1, 1980. Antonio Iosa was shot in both legs.

After 29 years, he still suffers from this attack everyday, both physically and mentally.

The most difficult and hurtful thing is that people, loved ones and people in general, do not seem to understand what impact the assault has on him.

*“Though family and friends can be big supports, you are often alone with your pain.”*

**ANTONIO IOSA**

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“I feel it is vital that the perpetrators of violence understand the effects their actions have on victims.”

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Working as a London Metropolitan Police officer Pamela White responded to a call concerning a suspected car bomb device on December 17, 1983. What appeared to be a routine check, turned out to be a life-changing event. Though she came out of the IRA car bombing with no severe physical injuries, Pamela White was affected mentally by the incident. She lost confidence in everyday situations, but was afraid that asking for help or support meant risking her job.

Family and friends supported Pamela White in her struggle to come to terms with what happened and why she survived. Her inner anger did not subside until she had the opportunity to share her story with (former) IRA members and other victims.

*“I was ostracised by my colleagues who felt I was trying to gain attention and sympathy and had to change to another police station”*

**PAMELA WHITE**

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**“A people that gives in to tyranny will lose more than body and property; then the light will be extinguished.”**

Henk van Randwijk, Dutch poet



## TERRORISM AND THE STRENGTH OF VICTIMS

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Terrorism is targeted against society, but it affects individuals. Even victims chosen deliberately are more or less the target by accident – because they symbolise the values which the terrorists want to destroy. Terrorism takes advantage of existing conflicts and lines of division. Therefore, both at the level of society and for the individual, we must prevent people from living without any real contact, and to ensure that people feel included and respected. This involves combating poverty and creating conditions so that people can participate in society.

After an attack, it is essential that we remain conscious of the things that bind us. Our core European values are: freedom, solidarity, and respect for each other. These are the cornerstones for a peaceful society, and are essential for social cohesion. If a crime is not punished, the injustice remains. A sensible society, however, would not give in to the need for retaliation. Such a society would try not to exclude people, but include them, by showing that they can reach out to each other, in spite of dividing lines. Such a society takes its own values seriously.

*“We should feel inspired by your strength. Your strength to be here today. Your strength to show us that you have not been broken.”*

**Ernst Hirsch Ballin**  
Dutch Minister of Justice

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“Resilience: you’ve got it!”

# IMPACT THE MUSICAL

Children are directly and indirectly exposed to terrorism and natural disasters, which can fill them with fear. The goal of “Impact – The Musical” is to increase resilience in children. It wants to provide them with the appropriate tools to healthily deal with their feelings about possible threats, so they are able to “bounce back”.

The musical and the accompanying teaching material offer children understandable information on resilience and (historical) backgrounds to terrorism. Moreover, it provides them with the opportunity to express their fears and feelings and playfully learn about positive ways to deal with them.

**Impact – The Musical**

An intervention for primary schoolchildren





# CONCLUSIONS

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The stories brought by different speakers from different countries, represent the voice of the victims of terrorism. Emotional stories fed by personal experiences and grief. Personal, but with a universal message: listening to the victim's voice contributes to social cohesion. That is to say, participants of the conference recognised social cohesion as an important concept, affecting the bonds that keep people together. Social cohesion was presented as a basic European value. A 'social fabric' based on tolerance and respect, mutual understanding and harmonic interactions. Terrorism threatens this fabric, by making in-groups and out-groups salient. Existing conflicts within society may serve as a catalyst. The victim's voice can serve as a reminder of the universal values our society is built on. It is an instrument to nourish tolerance and respect. Still, the voice itself must be remembered. This can be done by stimulating the exchange of victim experiences through societies. The victim's voice must be heard and in this respect its representatives play a crucial role, as well as media, politicians and governments. Awareness and platforms are needed. Self-organisation guidelines and educational material may assist victims in telling their story and may help communities to understand the personal and universal message.

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partners

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