

Baptists among religious leaders in event to mourn victims of 9/11, promote religious freedom

September 8, 2011

WASHINGTON (ABP) - Prominent religious leaders of various faiths joined Sept. 8 in Washington to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

[Baptist Joint Committee](#) Executive Director Brent Walker, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal and Carroll Baltimore, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, were among leaders in the interfaith group formed to celebrate America's faith communities' role in bringing healing to a nation still recovering from fear and division that have defined the country during the last decade.

Along with mourning victims of 9/11, the coalition, called Shoulder to Shoulder, highlighted religious organizations that have led grassroots efforts to unite religious communities across the country in the face of anti-Muslim sentiment.

Shoulder to Shoulder was formed last year to fight anti-Muslim sentiment by encouraging freedom and peace. In Thursday's ceremony at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, the leaders celebrated the religious community's role in helping to heal the nation.

"A decade after our nation was attacked, we honor those who lost their lives on Sept. 11, not only with uplifting words and enduring memories, but

with a renewed commitment to the common good and the bedrock values that have made America a land of opportunity for people of diverse ethnicities and faiths,” the 26-member coalition said in a joint statement.

“The time has come to reclaim the sense of community and shared purpose that guided us through those trying days a decade ago. Fear-based politics and discrimination against Muslim Americans and those perceived to be Muslim disgrace the memories of those who perished on Sept. 11, and desecrate the core values that make our nation great. The presence in America of people of all faiths and belief systems enriches our diverse country. The ideals that unite us are more powerful than the differences that divide us.”

After the event, Walker spoke a word of support for the families surviving those killed in the attack and the importance of religious liberty for all, particularly for Muslim Americans.

“Our lives were changed forever on 9/11 when we suffered the most hellish act of aggression on our native soil since the War of 1812,” Walker said. “So, on this 10th anniversary, we remember those whose lives were lost and the families that survived them. We also pledge to continue our efforts to protect religious liberty for all people, particularly religious minorities. When anyone’s religious liberty is denied, everyone’s is in jeopardy.”

Other coalition members include American Baptist Churches USA, The Episcopal Church, the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

In the days after the attacks nearly 10 years ago, the BJC issued a statement calling for a national response that is “careful not to compound the tragedy by sowing seeds of hate, casting blame where it does not

belong, and seeking vengeance instead of justice.” It continued, “The response should be directed in ways that respect the religious freedom and civil liberties of all Americans, reject religious and ethnic stereotyping, and avoid the loss of innocent life.”

-Jeff Huett is director of communications for the Baptist Joint Committee.