

Seeking Solutions for Drug Related Crime in Philadelphia and the Broader USA

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The following was discussed on the Islamic radio talk show 'Living Islam' on WURD 900 AM Philadelphia, PA on March 26, 2007

In 2006, there were 406 reported murders in Philadelphia, PA. That's at least one murder per day. This year so far, more than 100 people have also been killed. So it seems that Philadelphia is already on its way to try to break last year's record.

Thus far, it appears that local law enforcement agencies haven't been able to do much to curb the violence likely because of the fact that murders usually happen in the absence of those prepared to do anything to stop them.

Local government likely seems to either not know what to do, or not care enough about the surge in killings to brainstorm a broader formula to help effectuate a lasting solution or remedy to this problem.

Instead of being just one to point the finger at who is responsible, I feel that the least that a common citizen like me can do to help is to propose an overall approach to mitigating the problem of drug violence in America's big cities in general and in Philadelphia in particular.

I believe that the problem of drug violence can only be effectively brought to an end through the following factors: money, moral teachings, the efforts of common citizens & community organizations, government, and courage.

I. Money

The average drug peddler who is asked why he peddles drugs would likely respond that it's because of the M-O-N-E-Y. What is natural in all humans is the desire to live a good and comfort-filled life. That being the case, it is also natural for them to seek the means by which they can achieve that comfort. If the means is both lawful and moral, the life of that person and the people around him will likely be affected and impacted very positively. But if the means is something unlawful or immoral, life will become very difficult or even perilous for that person and for those around him. For these reasons, it becomes self-evident that the drug peddler requires an alternative legal means of subsistence (among other things) that is equally competitive to his current occupation or at least sufficient enough finance to provide him with a life and livelihood that helps him to be on par with the average member of society.¹ There are at least three sources from which these funds can be acquired: [1] Government, [2] Common citizens & community organizations, and [3] the drug peddler his self.

- *Government:* In terms of money, the government could provide recently released convicts and drug peddlers with incentives to abandon this destructive trade and behavior by offering them business grants that open up a way for them to become legitimate entrepreneurs practicing legitimate trades.² Some might say, well if we did that, we'd be rewarding criminal behavior. I'd say, not so. The time he served for the crime he committed is *supposedly* equal to the crime. If that's so, then why do people continue to hold it against them when they are released from prison? If you don't believe that the punishment is sufficient, then I think we should be pushing for legislation or even a constitutional amendment to correct what we believe to be broken in the system.³ You have to remember that it only keeps us safe when we ensure that our neighbor isn't dying of hunger while we have a 50-pound turkey on our dinner table.
- *Common citizens & community organizations:* Common citizens can contribute to the improvement of society by donating monies to a fund managed by local government or charities in conjunction with a team of community organizations that will help to produce a solid resource to create jobs if the government is unable or refuses to extend such support. Some things we just have to do for ourselves. We can develop networks in most or all major cities in the US with the aim of setting up alternative *transfer* community correction centers⁴ for ex-convicts to start new lives in different cities far away from the neighborhoods where

they initially started their downward slope. Of course, we'd need the backing of our congressmen and senators by pressuring them to pass legislation allowing such transfers.⁵ We can also seek their help in acquiring the grants needed in order to open up these specialized centers.⁶

- *Drug Peddlers*: Drug peddlers can help themselves also by purifying their wealth through investing the initial capital they used to start their drug business in some sort of legitimate and profitable business, community project, etc.⁷

II. Moral Teachings

History has taught us time and time again that legislation and the enforcement of laws are not enough to curtail the spread of corruption and crime. Traditional religion on the other hand that teaches people accountability for their actions in this world and in the next serves as one of the greatest forms of preventive measures, since the end result of one who has digested the spiritual teachings is an upstanding citizen who prevents his/her self from crime due to guilt, shame, or the fear of *God's* punishment.

In spite of this fact, history has also taught us that only a minority of the population will or does have the strength to avoid most forms of sin. Consequently, law enforcement and government administration are needed to serve as the *unseen* watchful eye of God that would-be criminals are cautious of, since they have very little consciousness of the One who truly watches over them and sees their every move and knows their every impulse.

For this reason, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the third successor to the Prophet Muhammad – may God bless and grant him peace – is recorded as saying,

“Verily God keeps order through [the power of] the governor (*sultan*) more than He keeps order through [the power of] the Qur'an.”

إن الله يزع باسلطان أكثر مما يزع بالقرآن

And in one saying passed down,

“The governor (*sultan*) is God's shadow in His earth.”⁸

السلطان ظل الله في أرضه

Unfortunately, in liberal democracies, like the US, whose economy thrives on an economic system of unrestricted capitalism, and makes the claim of granting citizens absolute freedom about their personal decisions and promises that it will not interfere in their private lives, much damage is done, since the principles of liberalism as a social construct remove any iota of shame or sense of guilt for one's wrongdoings. It has liberated man, not just from the oppression of other men. Rather, it has liberated him also from any thought of a wrathful God, and has made God into a cosmic love machine.

For these reasons and others, it becomes a priority importance for churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious institutions to focus their teachings and preaching on a kind of spirituality that tackles issues like anger, hatred, envy, conceit, greed, gluttony, ostentation, addiction, worry, grief, anxiety, eagerness, lust, etc. Those teachings should also focus on developing a close relationship with the Creator through trust, faith, love, reliance, gratitude, patience, perseverance, fear, hope, contentment, and repentance.

Religious organizations owe it to man to develop programs that help the spiritually weak to overcome their carnal urges, programs that are rooted in the teachings of their holy scriptures and their moral code.

III. Community Efforts

As for community organizations and individual citizens, they can contribute to the improvement of our community in a number of ways. For one, many of us can serve as mentors for young men and women who have lost their parents (one or both) to drugs, crime, incarceration, and homicide.⁹ We can adopt children who have been abandoned at birth by their drug addicted parents.¹⁰ We can make appearances at local middle and high schools to communicate with and give direction to adolescents and teenagers before they end up behind bars, dead, or impregnated.¹¹ And we can schedule community and extra-curricular trips to historical landmarks, and expose them to things like hunting, fishing, arts & crafts, etc.¹² Another thing we can do is donate time, money, food goods, and clothing to community funds and organizations that provide relief for ex-convicts, the poor, and the displaced.

IV. Government

Government (federal, state, and local) can all work together with us by making a sincere effort to curtail the drug and gun traffic, push for and pass legislation for setting up task forces to retrieve illegal arms,¹³ push to pass legislation that makes it easier for former offenders to return as a normal part of the community, and advise and properly survey the dealings of police officers.¹⁴

V. Courage

The last and perhaps the most important element needed in helping us recapture and restore some semblance of order in our communities is courage. The reason this is so important is that the natural reaction of those who profit from drug and gun trafficking is the fear of loss of one's wealth, property, and status. Any strong and united campaign against such corruption will likely be met with resistance by some who feel no need to change or to try to change the situation. Consequently, we have to expect that at times there may be human casualties and death threats involved from our efforts to clean up our communities. We must understand that we risk the same thing on a wider scale if we just sit back without at least saying something about the evil we witness.¹⁵ When a concerned citizen speaks up and informs authorities about certain activities that will potentially lead to a number of people being hurt or killed in his/her neighborhood, this is not snitching. One is only a snitch when he is a partner to the crime and then gives police information about the others who were involved with him. The code of the streets dictates this.¹⁶ And this is what snitching really is. The common person who is just trying to survive, live a normal life, and has no connection to criminal activity shares no blame of the stigma "snitch" when he is simply trying to save the lives of his children. For this reason, the Holy Koran says,

"And take guard against a chastisement that will not specifically strike those of you who are wrongdoers. And know that God is severe in chastisement." [8: 28]

Our Prophet Muhammad – may God bless and grant him peace – said,

"You shall enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong. Otherwise, God will include you all in the chastisement."¹⁷

His successor, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, said,

"Indecency never spreads among a people except that God includes them all in the tribulation."¹⁸

Summary

So the factors for change in my view are:

- money
- an emphasis on moral teachings in all religious establishments
- the efforts of common citizens & community organizations
- government assistance and legislation
- and courage

We ask God to help the afflicted peoples of America's inner cities and ghettos to weather the cyclone of violence. And we ask Him to touch the hearts of those with the longest hand who stand over us to return to taking on the tasks and duties of the positions that God has favored them with.

Sincerely,

Abdullah bin Hamid Ali

¹ It has been stated by some law enforcement officials that a number of the murders committed in Philadelphia are not believed to be drug related. Rather, many of them are the result of violent personal disputes over women, general presumptions of disrespect, and other stresses. I think that it's important not to exclude the stress of constant fluctuating interest rates, the constant and continual rise in gas prices, and the rise in the cost to heat our homes. The fact is that the average person doesn't believe that he/she needs to change his spending and consumption patterns. In addition, most people are not disciplined enough to do so. So I wouldn't be surprised that a number of common people have become involved in the drug trade also in order to ensure that they can pay their home heating bills from PGW (Philadelphia Gas Works). On one hand, one can simply expect for people to learn to live for less. But on the other hand, people should be given more time to make plans to do so. The changes that have happened with these *monopolizing* companies have happened almost overnight in spite of the fact that every household has an essential demand for such services. The job of government – instead of always siding with big business – should be to pass legislation barring utility companies from charging oppressive rates for essential services. If not barring them from doing so, government needs to step in to regulate prices to ensure that neither the company nor the private citizen is harmed greatly by such changing demands. Otherwise, they need to encourage competition by allowing other companies to step in as alternative suppliers of electricity and heating. Government is supposed to be for the service of everyone, not just those who bribe them through their large campaign donations.

² As the saying goes, "Give a man some fish, he'll eat for one day. Teach a man how to fish he'll eat for the rest of his life."

³ The unfortunate reality is that our current correctional system is organized in a way that it guarantees a steady flow of profit for both the department of corrections and private corporations. Telephone companies contract with the Department of Corrections that offer inmates high priced phone cards (starting at \$15.00) that many times cost much more than they would for a person in the general public. The families of inmates who don't have enough money to afford calling cards and can only call them collect are forced to change their plans to the company contracted with the Department, since collect calls can only be made if the family's service provider is the same as that of the prison's. The *monopolizing* company also demands from inmate families to make advanced payments in order to make the change from the old provider to the new one. Profit is also made from the inmate purchase of commissary items provided by the institution from other outside businesses. Inmates receive money to pay for these items in a number of ways: [1] family; [2] idle pay provided to them by the institution when an inmate doesn't have a job in the institution; or [3] from a job that pays the inmate between \$0.25 to \$0.35 cents per hour of work. Idle pay and monies used to pay for inmate salaries are subsidized by taxpayer money, of course. When inmates are authorized to make deathbed visits or viewings of family members, inmates/families are also charged to have their loved one attend. Inmate Improvement Organizations that sponsor annual run-a-thons and other fundraising programs also help to raise money for the department. Although much of the money is believed to be given to non-profit organizations, one can't help

but to entertain the thought that perhaps substantial portions of this money makes its way into the department's overall budget. Other than such matters, prison life these days is so comfortable for inmates that one is not surprised at the high rate of recidivism. An inmate who recently spent 5 to 10 years in prison usually wouldn't find it difficult to surmise a quick return to crime and then more time behind bars. Many of them find it easier to live behind bars than on the streets. To me, all of this shows that the system is broken and is likely why the name 'penitentiary' has stopped being applied to prisons and has been replaced by the word 'institution.' Things have to change.

⁴ A 'transfer community corrections center' is somewhat of a novel idea. Standard CCC's (Community Correction Centers) referred to as 'half-way houses' customarily are located within the same state the convict committed his crime. Transferring an ex-convict to a different city from his home city or home state would benefit offenders incarcerated for drug-peddling and possession, especially when the latter's associations played a major role in relapse. As for the peddler or drug related violent offender, this emigration would be a means by which his life can be spared from the common potentiality and high probability of retaliation. The concept of transfer is borrowed from the Islamic idea of "emigration" (hijra) or "withdrawal" with the aim of protecting one's religion, life, and welfare when one's environment doesn't allow one to prosper. The Holy Koran speaks of this, *"When the angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say: "In what [plight] were you?" They reply: Weak and oppressed were we in the earth." They say: "Was not the earth of God spacious enough for you to move yourselves away [from evil]?"* [4: 97]

⁵ As taxpayers, we should have some control over where our tax money is being spent. Federal, state, and city taxes are taken from those of us who are employed every payroll cycle. Were the approximately 1.5 million citizens of Philadelphia (or any other city for that matter) demand that one dollar of that amount be used each cycle to set up these alternate centers for corrective behavior, drug rehabilitation, vocational & educational training centers, it just might serve as a sign that we care about the degenerate state of our big cities.

⁶ What is important from all of this is that 'we the people' will be able to develop a list of demands from our potential representatives of government, and return the power back to the people. Government is here to serve the people and their needs, not vice-versa.

⁷ I emphasize that the drug peddler needs to invest the 'initial capital' to help his money to grow, because in Islam, any monies earned through unlawful means cannot be used for the personal benefit of the individual. If a person has profits from unlawful means, he is only allowed to retain the initial capital used to start the business enterprise and discard of the remainder based on an analogy made with the Koranic verse that prohibits interest-based transactions. The Koran 2: 275-276 says, *"O you who believe! Be conscious of God, and give up what remains of your demand for interest, if you are indeed believers. And if you do it not, take notice of war from God and His Messenger: but if you repent, you shall have your capital sums: you will deal not unjustly, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly."* For drug peddlers who claim to be Muslims, this verse applies to them directly, and to non-Muslims it applies indirectly. But of course, one who doesn't believe in the Holy Koran is not expected to live up to the standards of Islam. So such a person who happens to utilize every bit of his wealth earned by unlawful means - *profit and capital* - to invest in legitimate business ventures would not be restricted by these rules, naturally. The important thing is that the person tries to bring some sense of safety to his imperiled state by being content with what he has at this point, and not allowing his self to be driven by greed to his doom.

⁸ The expression that "The sultan is God's shadow in His earth" is no more than a metaphor, which means that as God governs and maintains order in the universe, the governor has been charged with maintaining order in the earthly realm. One should not assume that this means that God is a material object like His creation that emits a shadow, because God is unlike anything in existence.

⁹ The Holy Koran strongly encourages taking on the care and custody of orphans. In Surah 107: 1-3 it says, *"Have you seen one who denies the Judgment [to come]? Then such is the one who repulses the orphan, and encourages not the feeding of the indigent."* It also says in Surah 90: 11-16, *"But he (man) does not haste on the path that is steep. And what will explain to you the path that is steep? [It is] freeing the bondman, or the giving of food in a day of privation, to the orphan with claims of relationship, or to the indigent [down] in the dust."*

¹⁰ Islam also supports the system of adoption. But it does not support the practice of stripping adopted children of their birth names. The Koran says, *"Nor has he (God) made your adopted sons your sons. Such is [only] your [manner of] speech by your mouths. But God tells [you] the Truth, and He shows the [right] way. Call them by after their fathers: that is more just in the sight of God. But if you know not their father's names, [then they are] your brothers in faith or your friends. But there is no blame on you if you make a mistake therein: [what counts is] the intention of your hearts; and God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* [33: 5-6]

¹¹ A fundamental problem with our youth today is the lack of positive role models and adult mentors who make them feel loved and cared for. The problem of disenfranchised youth in the inner cities can be directly

attributed to the Western culture of sexual promiscuity. Children learn very early – and at times encouraged by parents – to engage the opposite sex. We are advised that if we are thinking seriously about having sex to ensure we use protection (i.e. condoms, birth controls, etc.). Marriage is discouraged, because society considers us to be too young to marry. We are expected to be responsible and adult enough to avoid getting pregnant or acquiring STD's (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), but not adult enough to take on the burden of building and maintaining a family. Consequently, so many young adults (teenagers) today have babies they really never wanted, and the fathers of these children abandon them, because all they ever wanted was to enjoy the pleasure of these young ladies, since that's what our society teaches us. Be responsible but don't be responsible! Pleasure before business! Have fun and enjoy life! In turn, these fatherless and family-less children grow up in households where many times the mother is constantly changing partners whose babies they also give birth to; men who eventually abandon them too. And many if not all of these children grow up aimlessly; raised by the television, allowed to walk the streets late at night, growing up feeling unimportant and uncared for. Eventually they meet up with other young men with similar upbringings with whom they form alliances and make them feel the sense of family they never felt before. Not long after, they engage in crime sprees, drug alliances, and other things. It's just a matter of time after this before they end up in one of our prisons serving a life sentence on installment, a life sentence without parole, or suffering an early death. For this reason, the Holy Koran says, *"Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is an indecent [deed] and an evil way."* [17: 32]

¹² One should not underestimate the potential impact of exposure. When a person is unaware of what kind of options and alternatives he may have and how big God's green earth is, his time is likely to be busied with evil thoughts and suggestions. And idle time is one of man's worst enemies, because if we don't preoccupy our time with beneficial works, Satan will preoccupy us with what is harmful to our souls. The Holy Koran 29: 20 says, *"Say: 'Travel through the earth and see how God did originate creation; Thus will God produce a later creation: for God has power over all things.'* In 22: 46 it reads, *"Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts [and minds] may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear?"* And one of the great religious personalities of Islamic history, Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Shafi'i, said in speaking of one of the great wisdoms he learned from the Sufis of his time, "Time is like the sword. If you don't cut it, it will cut you."

¹³ One of the basic problems stated by Philadelphia Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson is that gun control laws are so lax that a person who buys a registered hand gun is not obliged to report the loss when it happens. So if a crime is committed with the gun a year later and the original owner is asked about it then, if he states that his gun was stolen, the law precludes such a person from criminal prosecution or even criminal neglect. This leaves a big question mark (?) in the minds of most people. Does the government really even care about the surge in the violence? Some would say that as long as big companies (viz. NRA) are profiting from the sale of guns to the poor people of the inner cities, then it's no problem of theirs. The same goes for those who are believed to be profiting from the sale of drugs in these communities who have their own political connections. If we can identify the people who can potentially be funding the ever threatening war machines of our enemies overseas and freeze their assets, I'm quite sure that our government – if they really care – can also identify those who are involved in the underground gun and drug trade and put a stop to them too. Recently, a bill was passed that requires that the FBI enter the names of millions of mentally disturbed individuals into their system in order to ensure that such people are not sold hand guns. This all resulted from the Virginia Tech shooting incident where a young man of Asian descent allowed to purchase a number of hand guns went on a killing spree on the university's campus. This bill is a good step in the right direction. However, most of the murders that happen in big cities are carried out by people who have criminal records who can't legally own hand guns, although the guns they use are purchased by or stolen from those who can. Or, they are purchased on the black market. So who will be brave enough to present legislation that curtails this? How about a class-action suit--- similar to the suit that hit the tobacco companies hard---that punishes the NRA (National Rifle Association) for the thousands of deaths that occur on our soil from the illegal sale of guns?

¹⁴ Asking that the government survey the dealings of police officers is not to suggest that all police officers are involved in criminal and unethical activities. But there are enough who are, which has left a very bad impression on today's youth to the extent that a considerable number of them have disdain for those in law enforcement. They even feel that no one should even consider becoming a police officer, because they believe that "all cops are dirty." In spite of this blatant exaggeration of facts, those who do have a habit of planting evidence and extorting drug peddlers for personal gain send a message to the 'unprotected' criminal that compliance with the law does no good. Perpetrators of crimes are captured, convicted, and placed into correctional institutions only to be taught that if they obey the rules and follow the proper procedure in submitting any grievances, they will receive justice. After being bitten by the system behind bars even yet again, what reason would a person have to stay committed to the rule of law after being released?

¹⁵ The Prophet Muhammad – may God bless and grant him peace – said, “Whoever of you sees a wrong, let him change it with his hand. If he is unable, change it with his tongue. If he is unable, change it in his heart. And that is the weakest of faith.” (Bukhari, Muslim, and others)

¹⁶ “Don’t Snitch!” is the code of the street. But it is not the code of humanity. We must remember this.

¹⁷ This hadith can be found in Ibn Majah, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, and Ahmad.

¹⁸ Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah of Hafiz ibn Kathir 5/4.