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Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf : Protecting Islam By Telling the Truth

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Sometimes a crime is so heinous and weird that it stuns the world.

That is what is happening in Nigeria where the terrorist group Boko Haram kidnapped more than 270 schoolgirls last month and has killed thousands of people in northern Nigeria in the past few years.

In a video announcing that he would sell the kidnapped girls, Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, said, "Either you are with us -- I mean real Muslims, who are following Salafism -- or you are with Obama, Francoise Hollande, George Bush -- Bush! -- Clinton."

By Salafism, Shekau was referring to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that grew up to counter Western influence in the Middle East and Africa. Boko Haram is often loosely translated as "Western education is a sin." Salafism renounces modernity and insists on cleansing Islam to its very roots. Some Salafi Jihadis wrongly believe that Islam requires them to promote violence against civilians.

That is not just a wrong interpretation of Islam, it is blasphemously wrong. Everything that Boko Haram is doing -- wanton killing of civilians, capturing and selling girls, denying that women should have an education -- is in stark violation of Islamic theology and law.

The moral weight of Islam must be activated. It is time -- past time -- for the leaders of those countries that have the political and religious influence in the Islamic world to shape and lead the global discourse on Islam to stand up and loudly condemn this crime and all of the other crimes committed by extremists who preach violence in the name of Islam.

Scholars and leaders from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt -- countries that are Islamic thought leaders -- must make clear unequivocal statements where Islam stands: that these actions are forbidden by Islamic law. They need to tell the world that Sharia Law condemns killing innocents, capturing women and selling them into

slavery and that the perpetrators of these crimes have committed a capital offense that deserves death.

Every time some extremist Islamic group does something this horrible, it tars the entire religion around the world. Non-Muslims conclude that Islam is a violent religion stuck in the 7th century. When non-Muslims hear that most Muslims abhor this as much as they do, they demand to know, where are the moderate Muslims?

The answer is they are everywhere. The 1.5 billion Muslims around the world follow a peaceful religion that, like all other major religions, seeks a relationship with God and harmony among people. In these times, they should rise up and assert what they know is true about Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad ended the custom that women were property and insisted that they had rights -- a radical position in the 7th century. For his time period, he was a feminist. The Prophet consistently encouraged spiritual growth in the women around him. From the earliest times, the Prophet's wife and the women around him played key roles in defending and teaching the faith.

Muslims today need to maintain the Prophet's groundbreaking imperative to continually improve the status of women. The role of women is rapidly changing in Muslim societies. Educating women and opening the workforce to them is advancing Muslim societies much like the American society and economy were transformed when opportunities opened to women.

Islam prohibits taking an innocent life. The Quran equates killing an innocent with killing all of humankind. Sharia law condemns it. It is a sin against God. No paradise awaits the killer.

Boko Haram has violated Islam. What it is doing is fundamentally against what Islam preaches. Selling women? Where is that endorsed in the Quran? Nowhere. Boko Haram's actions are not religious; they are terroristic. They are misusing religion as a way to grab power. Their claim that they are in compliance with Islam is absolutely a lie.

Only by loudly countering this lie by telling the truth can we protect Islam.