Norwegian Adventist leader says hate must not prevail following attacks

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25 Jul 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...ANN staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's top leader in Norway on Friday said the church and the community must not let hatred prevail following a national tragedy of 76 people killed in a bombing and shooting spree.

Separately, the denomination's religious liberty director urged careful dialogue on the incident and cautioned that the ideology of the man who confessed to the acts should be referred to as "extremist" instead of "Christian Fundamentalist," as several news reports had indicated.

"Our thoughts are with relatives and friends of those who have been injured and killed," said Reidar Kvinge, president of the Adventist Church in Norway. "We are appalled by the cruel disregard for human life these actions show."

"The grave tragedy that has affected young, enthusiastic people gathered at Utøya must not lead us in Norway to let hatred prevail," Kvinge said.

Norwegian native Anders Behring Breivik, 32, confessed to a pair of July 22 attacks, which killed 76 people, The Washington Post reported. Breivik allegedly was responsible for the bombing of a government building in the capital, Oslo, and later gunned down dozens of teens and young adults at a youth camp of the Labor Party on the island of Utøya in Lake Tyrifjord.

Breivik had apparently targeted the nation's ruling Labor Party, a left-center party and historic supporter of immigration and multiculturalism. Breivik allegedly published earlier that day an online screed that railed against pluralism, including, in his words, the "Islamization of Western Europe."

The afternoon bomb attack on the government building did not affect a nearby Adventist Church property in Akersgt, but services on Saturday were canceled on advice from police, said Torre Tjeransen, Communication director for the Adventist Church in Norway.

The Adventist Church's national headquarters, along with a junior college, is located a few miles from the Utøya island in Lake Tyrifjord, Tjeransen said.

There are about 4,600 Adventists in Norway, a nation of about 4.9 million people.

In a statement today, John Graz, director of the Adventist world church's Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department said "media reporting that these attacks may have been motivated by right-wing Christian fundamentalism are profoundly disturbing."

"Such acts are utterly alien to Christian teachings and values," Graz said. "Violence carried out in the name of Christianity is an absolute distortion of a religion that finds its genesis in Jesus Christ, the 'Prince of Peace.'"

Graz also urged caution in the use of the term "fundamentalist" to describe the individual alleged to have carried out the attacks, instead proffering the term "extremist" as a more accurate description of the type of ideology and behavior that falls far outside the norms of a religious
The Seventh-day Adventist Church's oldest educational institution, Atlantic Union College, plans to lay off its entire staff of 97 full-time employees on July 31 because of a delay in a partnership proposal of the institution with church-run Washington Adventist University in Maryland.

Leaders of both institutions have been working to secure permission from Massachusetts' education authorities to operate AUC as a satellite campus of WAU following the loss of its accreditation from a regional accrediting agency effective July 31. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges cited financial reasons in its decision.

Meanwhile, plans are in place to enable the current and prospective AUC students to attend WAU during fall semester. About 450 current AUC students were affected, said William Jackson, director of marketing and recruitment at WAU.

In March, both Adventist-owned institutions signed a "memorandum of understanding" meant to allow WAU to establish a satellite location on the South Lancaster, Massachusetts campus.

In a July 14 press release, WAU officials said that the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has not processed the university's application to establish a satellite campus at AUC as school officials had planned. The proposal could take "up to a year," said Katy Abel, associate commissioner for external affairs for the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

"We're working through the process and are optimistic that we'll be able to operate soon after permission is granted by the commonwealth," WAU President Weymouth Spence said in the release.

"Fortunately, WAU has already been working with our students to provide a smooth transition to the Takoma Park campus," AUC President Norman Wendth said in the release.