Written by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rainbow PUSH Coalition
Tuesday, 26 February 2013 10:34

February 18, 2013 — Chicago suffers unbearable levels of gun violence, yet the victims remain largely silent. They travel from funeral home to graveyard, rather than march from church to gun shop. The president is applauded when he calls for action on gun violence, but before his plane leaves the tarmac, more are shot, including even the sister of one of the young children standing behind him during his address.

If we are to free ourselves of this terror, we will have to change our minds.

Victims of tyranny have three options. They can adjust, they can resent but turn anger inward, or they can fight back.

I recently spoke at the King College Prep High School, the school that Hadiya Pendleton was attending when shot to death. When I asked the students if they had a classmate in jail or knew someone who used drugs, nearly all said yes. When I asked if they knew someone who had brought a gun to school or secreted one in a car, they said yes. I asked if they would turn in someone who smuggled a gun into school — "No, no," was the answer. I asked if they would turn in someone who had a rope and a white sheet and hood hidden in their car. "The Klan," they said, "of course we'd turn them in to authorities."

They are more forceful in defying the impotent Ku Klux Klan than in challenging the presence and reality of dope and guns. Silence undermines security and betrays the possibility of freedom.

No one doubts the threat posed by guns and drugs. Last year, 65 young people in Chicago died in gun violence, the equivalent, as the president noted, of a Newtown every four months. This despite the fact that Chicago Police confiscate about 10,000 firearms each year.

This is a crisis.

Guns not only claim loved ones on the streets of Chicago. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that of the 30,000 suicides committed each year in the U.S., nearly 20,000 involve guns, and that suicide is now the No. 3 cause of teenage deaths.

We are being terrorized, yet we treat the terror as a normal part of life.

Real change can only occur when victims fight back. The victim might not be responsible for being down; but they are responsible for getting up. That's why Dr. Martin Luther King called upon us to be "creatively maladjusted" to abuse and injustice.

It is only when victims change their own way of thinking and stop tolerating the status quo that change becomes possible. Slave masters never retire. Slavery ends when the enslaved changed their minds. Segregationists did not end segregation; it ended when the segregated forced a new reality.

Yes, change requires leadership, inspiration and more. But in the end, the victims decide.

We will end the scourge of gun violence only when its victims decide that they can no longer accept the losses in lives and in security.

Victims have power. They have consumer power, boycott power, lawsuit power, marching power, the power of counterculture actions and moral authority. They have the power to disturb. They have the power to embrace a multifaceted approach that attacks the phenomena of guns in, drugs in, jobs out, home foreclosure exploitation and crippling poverty.

To go from adjustment to freedom, we have to be willing to march, to protest, to go to jail, to risk the rage of the oppressors, to challenge their ways and construct the world that we want to live in, a world without guns, without drugs, without violence.

It can be done — but only if we decide to act.

Keep up with Rev. Jackson and the work of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition at www.rainbowpush.org.