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Terrorism thrives on the ability to inspire fear in people and if it is not sensationalised, there is no incentive for the terrorist, according to a renowned scholar who assured there is no need to live in fear.

Pino Arlacchi, who spent years analysing violence and fear, believes that if terrorism in the media were given the prominence it deserved, that is, the same importance as a car accident, this would be the most radical blow to terrorism.

All world experts on terrorism agree that the more importance terrorist acts are given, the more such acts are encouraged.

"Amplifying the fear is the biggest favour one can do to terrorists. The wrong way to fight terrorism is to play their game. In so doing their acts become much bigger than they really are," Prof. Arlacchi, from the Italian University of Sassari, told an audience gathered at the Aula Magna, Valletta.

He was in Malta to launch his controversial book, The Great Deception: We Have Never Been More Secure, Yet Never More Vulnerable, which delves into the problems and myths surrounding terrorism and organised crime.

He said in no uncertain terms that former US President George W. Bush tackled the issue of terrorism in the worst possible manner.

"The victims of 9/11 are much fewer than the victims of the IRA in Ireland. But we Europeans are used to fighting it because we had to deal with it several times. We never sent armies in other countries to fight terrorism. We never put innocent people in jail. We used strategies of intelligence," he added.

He claimed there were two main industries which profited from this fear factor: the arms industry and the international media.

He believes the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, was a big opportunity for groups with certain interests to launch the Afghan and the Iraqi attacks.

"Behind every big war there is a big lie," Prof. Arlacchi said.

Fortunately, he said, the new US President Barack Obama has understood perfectly the best strategy to fight terrorism. "He knows it has to be done the intelligent way."

He said his experience in the United Nations as a director general in charge of fighting terrorism, organised crime and illegal markets had made him more optimistic: "I believe there is no problem created by men that cannot be solved by men themselves."

Prof. Arlacchi blamed the media for the portrayal, on a daily basis, of a world in chaos, pointing out that violence and conflict made better headlines.

After the end of World War II, there was an increase of peaceful relationships on both macro and micro levels. Europe, which had been the most violent continent for five centuries, had never been calmer, he said. Although for a time civil wars substituted international wars, these too subsided after 1989.

The civil wars were now only concentrated in three main world regions: Africa, Southeast Asia and Afghanistan.

Prof. Arlacchi, a renowned scholar on organised crime, money laundering and drug trafficking, said there was definitely a huge gap between the perception of security portrayed by the media and governments and the real facts.

"Ironically, peace is advancing but we believe we are living in a world which is on the edge of a catastrophe."

Over the last two decades, he said, the number of victims of terrorism all over the world was of an average of 200 to 300 per year - and this definitely did not qualify as a serious threat.

Collective paranoia, such as the fear built around the swine flu crisis, had to be curbed, he said. Swine flu played on the fear factor and was big business for the producers of vaccines.

"We should not be encouraging this. We are much stronger than our evils. The forces of peace are stronger than the ones of fear."

His arguments are based on scientific research. "The data we have are very reliable: there has been an astonishing decrease in violence. We live in a world that has never been so safe."

Article may be viewed at:
http://www.timesofmalta.com/ articles/view/20091016/local/ the-forces-of-peace-are- stronger-than-those-we-fear