

VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

# Candles lit in Geneva in sombre remembrance

*By Bill Harby*

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Lighting a candle at a memorial in Geneva on Monday for the victims of the Paris attacks

(Keystone)

**A few hundred people quietly gathered in a candle-lit circle on Monday night near the giant chessboards in Geneva's Bastions Park. They were there to honour not only those who were killed and injured in Friday's attacks in Paris, but also other victims of recent terrorism in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Kurdistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere.**

This subdued outpouring of sorrow, sympathy and protest followed a minute of silence at noon observed by many in Geneva and around Switzerland.

At the parliament building in Bern, in Basel office buildings and Zurich grocery stores, and on streets around the country, many paused to honour silently the dead and the survivors in Paris and beyond. At the Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL) the flags of France, Switzerland and the university were hung at half-mast. Similar acts of respect took place around Europe during the day.

The evening gathering in Geneva was an intimate vigil of strangers, friends and families from Switzerland, France and the Middle East, their downcast faces lit by the glowing candles.

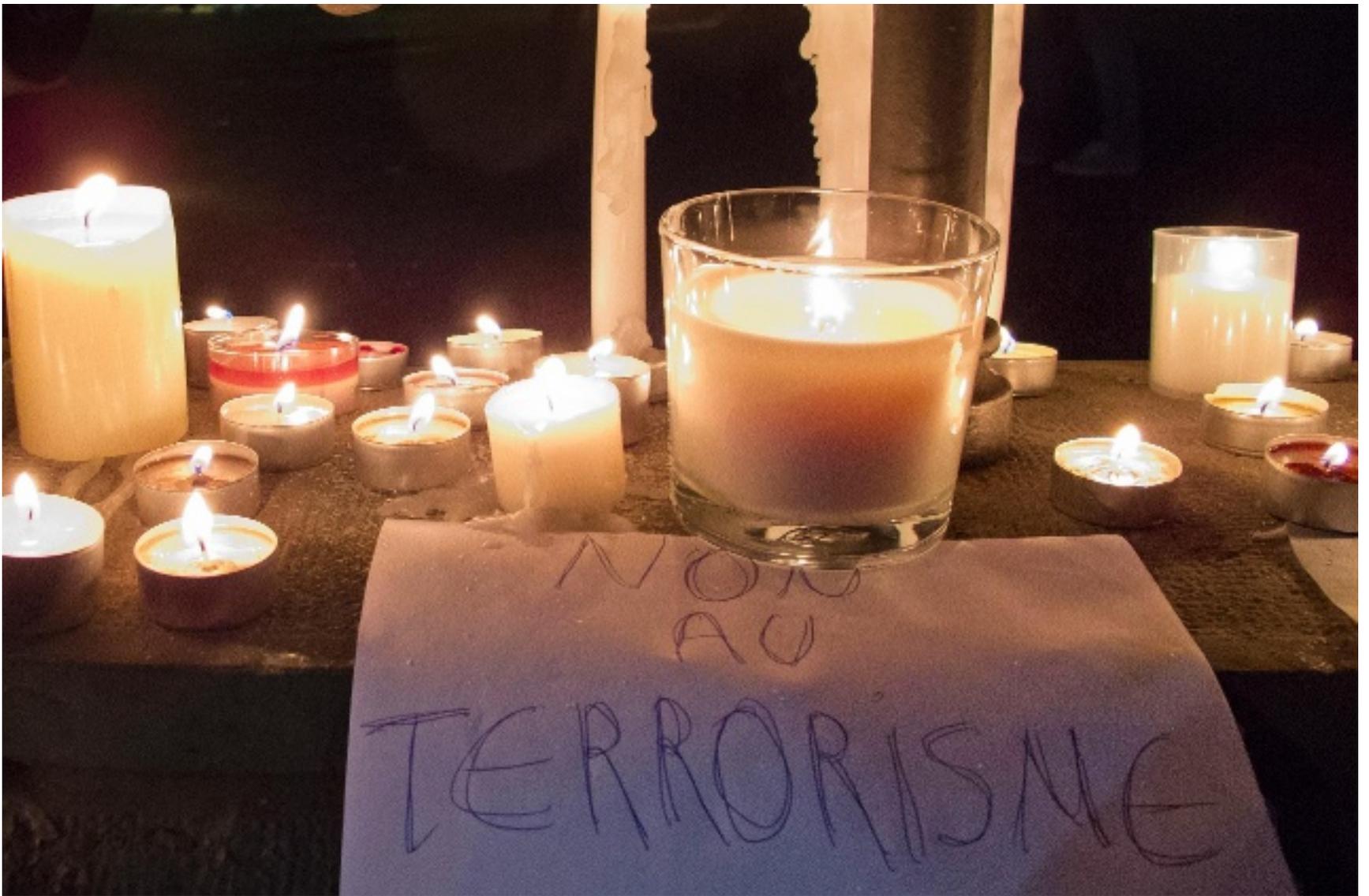
## **Not just Paris**

Coralie De Groote, a student from Paris, said she was there to reflect upon her city and her friends, none of whom was physically hurt in the attacks, but some of whom were traumatised. How does one combat this sort of terrorism? "Maybe love, I think," said De Groote with a sad smile.

Near a young woman holding aloft the French Tricolore, three young men silently displayed the flag of Lebanon, calling to mind the Beirut suicide bombings that had killed more than 40 people just four days earlier.

A small group of Kurds also displayed their flag. "We are here for the people of France," said Sarwar Jmor, 53, from Kurdistan. "And also for the Peshmerga, who are fighting Daesh in Sinjar [Iraq]," referring to the recently liberated former stronghold of the so-called Islamic State. Jmor said he has family members fighting in Iraq, including a cousin who has been wounded several times. "We must fight to hold our land, but there must also be a political solution."

Gradually, the circle of candles grew as students, old people, couples, mothers with young children and others approached and added their offerings. One young woman placed a single white rose among the candles.



Some people left a candle, others a message of hope or defiance  
(Bill Harby)

There were no fiery speeches, only a soft singing of "La Marseillaise," the French national anthem. More candles were lit along the gate leading into the park. Among them were a few messages written in French. Some seemed to be in the handwriting of children: "No to terrorism." "Yes to peace."

Aurélie Juge Judas from Geneva said she had brought her two young children "to be all together and make a better world". She said she is not religious, but thinks there would be less strife if people followed the teachings of Buddhism. "I am optimistic," she said.

## Joie de vivre

Across the circle, a man in a business suit murmured a prayer, made the sign of the cross, repeated the prayer and the sign of the cross, then turned and left.

A 21-year-old student, Julien, said he doesn't blame Islam. The problem is not the Koran, he said, but that the jihadists don't understand it.

Veronique Favre, 44, from Geneva, lit a candle with her six-year-old son. She said she felt it was important to bring him to the vigil to show him "we don't respond to violence with violence".

Underscoring this thought were two female friends standing outside the circle, sipping glasses of wine as they talked quietly. "This is part of what we want to keep," said Muriel Julliard, raising her glass with a smile. "Since the Paris attacks, I have been crying a lot with friends," she said, so she wanted to come to the gathering to celebrate French joie de vivre.

How does she think the world should fight terrorism? "With culture and education for everyone," she said. "Not religion."

For about an hour, people came, stood silently for a while, then drifted off. Some left a candle, some a message of hope or defiance. Eventually the crowd thinned, some people continuing on to the St Pierre Cathedral for another gathering to honour the victims of terrorism.

Meanwhile, in the park, the circle of flickering candles was now open to the night sky. A group of four or five joggers passed by as if it were any other evening. Just beyond, at the giant chessboards, players continued manoeuvring their armies.

## Muslims condemn terrorism in the name of Islam

Many Muslims in France and around the world quickly repudiated the Paris attacks and similar acts of terrorism. The Twitter hashtag “#NotinMyName” has been widely retweeted.

Likewise, on Sunday the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Switzerland released a letter vehemently condemning the attacks on Paris. “With grief and horror we learnt of the barbarous attacks which occurred last night in Paris,” it said.

The letter, signed by Sadaqat Ahmed, imam at Mahmud Mosque in Zurich, “condemns in the strongest terms the wave of massacres. Our thoughts and heartfelt prayers are with the bereaved families of the victims and the wounded.”

It continues: “The indiscriminate killing of innocent people is inexcusable and unreservedly condemned ... and those behind the criminal attacks must be immediately exposed and brought to justice.”

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