

Chris Stevens died in the service of his country. He died doing what he loved most -- working to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect between the people of the United States and the people of the Middle East and North Africa.

He was loved by many more Libyans than those who hated him for being an American. A few dozen fanatics penetrated his compound. More than 30,000 people in Benghazi demonstrated in protest over his death.

Chris was successful because he embodied the traits that have always endeared America to the world -- a commitment to democratic principles, and respect for others, regardless of race, religion or culture. Chris regarded and liked each person he met as an individual. He respected their views, whether or not he agreed.

One of his friends told us a tale that reflects his success on a small scale. Picnicking in the Libyan countryside, they met a local family. Chris immediately greeted them and suggested that they be photographed together. The young son of the patriarch of the family, suspicious and negative toward Americans, refused to participate. So Chris continued chatting with the others. When it was time to leave, the initially suspicious son presented Chris with a bouquet of flowers. "This is because you were so respectful to my father," he said.

Chris was not willing to be the kind of diplomat who would strut around in fortified compounds. He amazed and impressed the Libyans by walking the streets with the lightest of escorts, sitting in sidewalk cafes, chatting with passers-by. There was a risk to being accessible. He knew it, and he accepted it.

What Chris never would have accepted was the idea that his death would be used for political purposes. There were security shortcomings, no doubt. Both internal and outside investigations have identified and publicly disclosed them. Steps are being taken to prevent their reoccurrence.

Chris would not have wanted to be remembered as a victim. Chris knew, and accepted, that he was working under dangerous circumstances. He did so -- just as so many of our diplomatic and development professionals do every day -- because he believed the work was vitally important. He would have wanted the critical work he was doing to build bridges of mutual understanding and respect -- the kind of work that made him literally thousands of friends and admirers across the broader Middle East -- to continue.

So rather than engage in endless recriminations, his family is working to continue building the bridges he so successfully began.

One year ago this week, in response to a tremendous outpouring of support from around the world, we launched the J. Christopher Stevens Fund. The mission of the Fund is to support activities that build bridges between the people of the United States and those of the broader Middle East. This was the mission to which Chris dedicated his life.

We are grateful for each contribution received -- from friends and family, from the Government of Libya, and from people near and far moved by Chris and his story.

In the coming weeks and months, we will launch a number of innovative programs and initiatives. The focus of our activity is on young people, both here in America and across the Middle East and North Africa.

Chris served in the Peace Corps in Morocco, and his death was felt acutely by the Peace Corps family. Last year, in response to numerous queries from returned Peace Corps Volunteers during Peace Corps Week, we encouraged returned volunteers to fan out across America and speak with youth about their experiences abroad. We are now working with the Peace Corps to expand their reach into schools and communities across this country.

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where Chris studied as an undergraduate, announced on Sept 11 the Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens Memorial Fund for Middle Eastern Studies, endowed by the J. Christopher Stevens Fund. Our purpose is to encourage and inspire students in Middle Eastern and North African scholarship.

In Piedmont, CA, where Chris spent his teen years, the Piedmont Unified School District Board of Education has voted to name the Piedmont High library the Ambassador Christopher Stevens Memorial Library. Chris was inspired by the Piedmont High School motto “Achieve the Honorable”.

Later this fall, together with a coalition of public and private partners, we will launch the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative. This initiative will embrace the power of technology to fuel the largest ever increase in people-to-people exchanges between the United States and the broader Middle East, vastly increasing the number and diversity of youth who have a meaningful cross-cultural experience as part of their formative education, and reaching over one million youth by 2020.

Later this year, the University of California’s Hastings College of the Law, from which Chris graduated in 1989, will host the Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens Symposium. The event will emphasize law and public policy as used in practice to advance global understanding and peace, principles to which Chris was committed.

There have been more awards bestowed, and honors given, in Chris’ memory than we could have ever thought possible. But as we’ve said before, we have received letters from thousands of people all over the world who were touched by Chris’ example. His openness touched a chord in their hearts.

Chris would have wanted to be remembered for that.
Thank you. The Family of Chris Stevens