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Caution over linking autism with school massacre in United States

Numerous media reports have claimed that, Adam Lanza, the young man who killed 20 children 6 adults at an elementary school in the United States on Friday, had Asperger syndrome.

While claims that Lanza had Asperger syndrome (an autism spectrum disorder) remain unverified at this point in time, Autism-Europe urges the wider community to be cautious about making links between autism and violent crime.

On this tragically sad occasion, Autism-Europe's Director, Aurélie Baranger, expresses "our deepest sympathies for the victims of the massacre at Sandhook Elementary School, their families and the community of Newtown, Connecticut".

Ms Baranger explains that, "We should understand this tragedy as the act of an individual, not typical of a person with autism."

"We urge the international community, including journalists and other individuals, to avoid making incorrect assumptions or judgements about people with autism," she continues.

"As with the rest of society, the vast majority of people who have autism are law-abiding citizens."

"People with autism throughout Europe, the United States and the rest of the world, already face many barriers and much discrimination. Additional negative stereotyping in the media only leads to further stigmatisation and difficulties for people who have autism."

"When writing media reports, we urge journalists in particular to take appropriate care to avoid further stigmatising people who have autism," she continues.

Autism affects around 1 in 150 people in Europe. It is a lifelong disability that affects the development and functioning of the brain. People who have autism experience difficulty with communication, social interaction and often display restricted interests and repetitive behaviours. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that the symptoms vary between individuals, ranging from mild to severeⁱ. For more information about autism, please visit: www.autismeurope.org

For more information, and or interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurelie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe: Tel: +32 (0)477 70 59 34 Email: aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org

ⁱ Barthélémy et al, 2012, *Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders - Identification, Understanding, Intervention*, <http://www.autismeurope.org/files/files/persons-with-autism-spectrum-disorders-identification-understanding-intervention.pdf>

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