

This Perilous Moment: A Statement from Religious Leaders and Communities on the Crisis of Racial Injustice and Inequity and the Current Protests

June 2, 2020

We write together and in one voice, with urgency, as people of faith and as religious and spiritual leaders that represent the diverse faith traditions of United States of America. We are Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Indigenous, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Taoist, Unitarian Universalist, Zoroastrian, and many others.

Our words come in an hour of peril informed by a sense of crisis. Racial injustice, deep inequities, hate speech, brutality, and authoritarian power converge in a vulnerable moment when millions are infected and affected by a global virus that we have yet to find either a vaccine for or any medication to deliver us from. This endangers the fabric of our society.

Recent recurrent violence against African Americans made inescapably public has brought to a head long-stewing, justified, and righteous anger.

Our wicked scourge of discrimination and racism is structural, systemic, systematic, and institutional. We live with its legacy daily in a myriad of forms, seen and unseen.

We soberly own up to the fact that our religious communities have been complicit for far too long. We have upheld in far too many ways the false tenets that enable racism to continue in our society.

Our nation's original sin of racism necessitates a longform response effort that will span generations and advance reconciliation, realignments, and reparations. Long after protests have quelled and headlines shifted, we must continue praying with our feet and hands and working together to resolve the insidious impacts of the ugly legacy of slavery, the blight of racism, and the multiple forms of discrimination in our communities.

We must do better at addressing our roles in perpetuating injustices. We will continue to point towards the deep wellsprings that our respective faiths can offer in fostering hope, justice, and reconciliation.

We are here to stand with those who are rightly and justifiably enraged at police brutality and racial injustice, and who feel unheard and unheeded in their lamentations. At the same time, we strongly discourage the defacement and destruction of public and private property and unequivocally condemn the opportunistic violent actions of extremist groups that have sought to co-opt this moment for their own distracting agendas.

Law enforcement have an important and vital role in our society to serve and protect all of us, and we support their peaceable actions to uphold just laws. We celebrate the law enforcement leadership who are visibly acting in solidarity with their communities and who are calling for reforms that will lead to safer policing and communities and to racial justice.

Therefore, as faith leaders, together, we share that:

- We *feel, hear, and understand* the rage.
- We *confess* that we have a sickness in America that is spiritual and moral in nature even in as much as it is cultural, economic, political, and social. Our sacred texts and traditions have been used, wrongly so, to further racial injustice. Yet, they are also a deep well that informs our understanding of justice, and which can now call us all towards our better angels to overcome this crisis. People of faith must stand for love and stand up for equity, equality, and justice.
- We *reflect on* Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s observation that a riot is “the language of the unheard” as we insist that our voices and our actions are enjoined with the lawful protestors, as we pray unceasingly for peace and justice to prevail and for healing of hearts of all those feeling the pain of these traumas.
- We *ask for* the looting to stop as it only distracts from the purposes that our collective concerns gave rise to in the beginning – namely, addressing racial injustice, police brutality, and white supremacy.
- We *recognize* that each of the actions we take now represents steps towards one of two possible different paths – inclusive democracy or authoritarian state. We choose decisively to walk towards inclusive democracy, where faiths and freedoms flourish. We challenge every encroachment of any authoritarian state.
- We *call to account* our elected officials and law enforcement leadership on every level.
- We *uphold* our responsibilities to act now and to live with intention through the real discomfort of this crisis, and all the things after it, that require us to co-steward the healing our society needs.

We commit to the following call to action and invite others to join us:

- 1) To pray and act together for our shared future, knowing that we are called to love our neighbor.
- 2) To address racism in our society and acknowledge our complicity in it, in all of its insidious forms. This includes visibly participating in non-violent protests, calling out racial injustices, and problem solving and partnering with affected communities as they lead.
- 3) To ask our local and regional law enforcement and political leadership to immediately cease all forms of violence against non-violent protestors, and that non-violent and non-lethal means be employed in addressing the behavior of rogue actors committing violence.
- 4) To call upon local and state governments to facilitate the means for constructive, non-violent protests to continue to take place. And we call for them to investigate the injury or death of any persons participating in the protests or rioting.
- 5) To use our voices to speak up not only for racial justice, and the economic justice it necessitates, but also against the militarization and authoritarian use of our law enforcement. We have to be able to trust that the rule of law is applied fairly and equitably to all parties, else it is not the rule of law.
- 6) To call upon people of faith to educate themselves about the very real impacts of racism and to understand and sojourn with movements led by persons of color for justice, equality, and equity.
- 7) To support efforts at diversity, equity, and inclusion in our places of worship, workplaces, and lives.
- 8) To encourage volunteerism and philanthropic commitments to institutions working to advance racial justice and harmony.