



**RAISING THE MILLION MAN MARCH:
REMEMBERING AND REAFFIRMING ITS MISSION**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT WAS 26 YEARS AGO, OCTOBER 16, 1995, THAT we stood firmly together, 2 million plus strong in Washington, D.C. Called to action by Min. Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam and the critical juncture and demands of our history, we declared our commitment to assume a new and expanded responsibility in life, love and struggle. Below follows an excerpt from the Million Man March/Day of Absence Mission Statement focusing on the shared responsibility of Black men and women in holding themselves responsible, as well as the government and corporate world, and raising issues insightfully and compelling current.

“Central to our practice of responsibility is holding responsible those in power who have oppressed and wronged us through various challenges. At the core of the practice of speaking truth to power is the moral challenge to it to be responsible, to cease its abuse, exploitation and oppression, and to observe its basic role as a structure instituted to secure human rights, not to violate them or assist in their violation. And where it has violated its trust, it must be compelled to change.

Historically, the U.S. government has participated in one of the greatest holocausts of human history, the Holocaust of African Enslavement . . . Moreover, even after the Holocaust, racist suppression continued, destroying lives, communities and possibilities . . . We thus call on the government of the United States to atone for the historical and current wrongs it has committed against African people and other people of color. Especially, do we call on the government of this country to address the morally compelling issue of the Holocaust of African Enslavement. To do this, the government must: publicly admit its role and the role of the country in the Holocaust; publicly apologize for it; publicly recognize its moral meaning to us and humanity through establishing institutions and educational processes which preserve memory of it, teach the lessons and horror of its history and stress the dangers and destructiveness of denying human dignity and human freedom; pay reparations; and discontinue any and all practices which continue its effects or threaten its repetition.

We call on the government to also atone for its role in criminalizing a whole people, for its policies of destroying, discrediting, disrupting and otherwise neutralizing Black leadership, for spending more money on imprisonment than education, and on weapons of war than social development; for dismantling regulations that restrained corporations in their degradation of the environment and failing to check a deadly environmental racism that encourages placement of toxic waste in communities of color. And of course, we call for a halt to all of this.

Furthermore, we call on the government to stop undoing hard won gains such as affirmative action, voting rights and districting favorable to maximum Black political participation; to provide universal, full and affordable health care; to provide and support programs for affordable housing; to pass the Conyers Reparations Bill; to repeal the Omnibus Crime Bill; to halt disinvestment in social development and stop penalizing the urban and welfare poor and using them as scapegoats; to adopt an economic bill of rights including a plan to rebuild the wasting cities; to craft and institute policies to preserve and protect the environment; and to halt the privatization of public wealth, space and responsibility.

In addition, we call on the government of the U.S. to stop blaming people of color for problems created by ineffective government and corporate greed and irresponsibility; to honor the treaties signed with Native Peoples of the U.S., and to respect their just claims and interests; to increase and expand efforts to eliminate race, class and gender discrimination, and to stop pandering to white fears and white supremacy hatreds and illusions and help create a new vision of human and societal possibilities. We also are compelled to call on the government of this country to craft a sensible and moral foreign policy that provides for equal treatment of African, Caribbean and other Third World refugees and countries; that forgives foreign debt to former colonies; that fosters a just and equitable peace and recognizes the right of self-determination of peoples in the Middle East, in the Caribbean and

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around the world; that rejects embargoes which penalizes whole peoples; that supports the just and rightful claims and interests of Native Peoples, and that supports all Third World countries in their efforts to achieve and maintain democracy and sustainable economic and social development. Finally, we call on the government and the country to recognize and respond positively to the fact that U.S. society is not a finished white product, but an unfinished and ongoing multicultural project and that each people has both the right and responsibility to speak their own special cultural truth and to make their own unique contribution to how this society is reconceived and reconstructed.

We begin our challenge to corporations by rejecting the widespread notion among them, that corporations have no social responsibility except to maximize profit within the rules of an open and competitive market, through cutting costs, maximizing benefits and constantly increasing technological efficiency. Our position is that no human conduct is immune from the demands of moral responsibility or exempt from moral assessment. The weight of corporations in modern life is overwhelming and their commitment to maximizing profit and technological efficiency can and often do lead to tremendous social costs such as deteriorating and dangerous working conditions, massive layoffs, harmful products projected as beneficial, environmental degradation, deindustrialization, corporate relocation, and disinvestment in social structures and development.

We thus call on corporations to practice a corporate responsibility that requires and encourages efforts to minimize and eventually eliminate harmful consequences which persons, communities and the environment sustain as a result of productive and consumptive practices . . . and to respect the dignity and interest of the worker in this country and abroad, to maintain safe and adequate

working conditions for workers, provide adequate benefits, prohibit and penalize racial and gender discrimination, halt displacement and dislocation of workers, encourage organization and meaningful participation in decision-making by workers, and halt disinvestment in the social structure, deindustrialization and corporate relocation.

Moreover, we call on corporations to reinvest profits back into the communities from which it extracts profits, to increase support for Black charities, contribute more to Black education in public schools and traditional Black universities and colleges, and to Black education in predominantly white colleges and universities; to open facilities to the community for cultural and recreational use and to contribute to the building of community institutions and other projects to reinvest in the social structure and development of the Black community.

IN FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF PROFIT MADE from Black consumers, we call on corporate America to provide expanded investment opportunities for Black people; engage in partnership with Black businesses and businesspersons; increase employment of Black managers and general employees; conduct massive job training among Blacks for work in the 21st century; and aid in the development of programs to halt and reverse urban decay. Finally, we call on corporations to show appropriate care and responsibility for the environment; to minimize and halt pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural resources, and the destruction of plants, animals, birds, fish, reptiles and insects and their natural habitats; and to rebuild wasted and damaged areas and expand the number, size and kinds of areas preserved.” And we unavoidably and unhesitatingly committed ourselves to the righteous and relentless struggle to achieve these goals. ▲

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