



**REAFFIRMING AFRICAN LIBERATION DAY:  
DEALING WITH ITS DEEPER MEANING**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

The concept and celebration of African liberation, like the earlier and ongoing struggles to achieve it, have had a complex and complicated history, full of twists and turns, interruptions, redefinitions and redirections. Indeed, the genealogy of the names and notions of African Liberation Day closely reflect the course of development of African liberation struggles themselves, beginning with the name African Freedom Day in 1958 at the early stage of African independence and moving to and thru 1963 when the OAU renamed it African Liberation Day. During this period, the predictions and promise of liberation loomed high above the horizon and there was an increase in demands and movements of independence, the intensification and expansion of armed struggle and a pervasive sense of inevitable and awesome defeat and destruction of colonial and imperialist oppression. And now in 2008 with Africa savagely interrupted in its march toward liberation, we witness the recasting of African Liberation Day, as Africa Day, stripped of its reference to struggle, as if to hide from sight and memory the needed work and struggle-demanding way to liberation.

But clearly renaming the day does not eliminate the need for liberation or the imperative of struggle to achieve it. As always, the struggle begins with an overcoming of our weaknesses and turning our weaknesses into strengths as our ancestor Amilcar Cabral taught us. For as he informed us, our greatest struggle is the struggle against our weaknesses or as we say in Us, the struggle against that in us which is in contradiction to our values and the choice we've made for liberation and ever higher levels of human life.

As we gather together again this year to celebrate African Liberation Day, May 25, we must bear in mind the deep meaning of this day to us as African people. As Cabral has also told us, our liberation struggles have "a deep significance for both Africa and the world" in this "epoch-making moment of history", not only because of the wide and worthy path it opens to our freedom and the future we carefully and self-consciously craft for the well-being and flourishing of our people, but also because at the same time, it opens up and increases space for human freedom and flourishing as a whole. Thus, to honor the invitation history has handed us, we must, Cabral says, "regard ourselves as deeply committed to our people and committed to every just cause in the world" at the same time. Indeed, as the Hon. Marcus Garvey reminded us, the whole world must be our province and project in the interest and furtherance of African and human freedom

This unavoidably calls for a deep and disciplined centering of ourselves in our own culture, extracting models of excellence and achievement and embracing its life-affirming and life-enhancing values. And this means paying rightful and repeated homage to our ancestors who opened up indispensable ways and windows for understanding and transforming the world for the good, instilling in us at the dawn of human history, thru the *Husia*, *Odu Ifa* and other sacred texts and teachings, core values that serve as foundation and framework for our life and work in the world. Among these principles are: the oneness of being; the sacredness of life; the dignity and divinity of the human person; the essential need and normalness of freedom and justice for human life and flourishing; the rewarding

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resource and treasured-status of truth; the imperative of ethical consideration and conduct in all we do; and the moral obligation and upward thrust of righteous and relentless struggle.

We must, then, understand and assert ourselves as a people who remain ever-resistant survivors of the hurricanes and hazards of nature and the hardships and horrors of history; as steadfast soldiers who refuse to sit down or surrender and remain alert and active in the interest of our people and the world; and as dedicated and determined descendants of those monuments of men and women who knew and taught that there is no solution in surrender, no safety in submission and no real future not forged in the transformative furnaces of sacrifice and struggle for good in and for the world.

On this day, let us also rightfully send greetings of solidarity, support and struggle to all the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world; messages of condolence and continued commitment to the families and friends of those who have fallen fighting on the battlefield for the new world; and congratulations and praise to all those who remain steadfast in the struggle; still stand strong and hold hard onto hope in the midst of the horror and unhinging things we witness and confront in our world.

There is such a long unfinished agenda with almost every item urgent and every matter of pressing importance. There is need of justice for the people of New Orleans—respect for their right to return and rebuild their lives and communities and retain the cultural character of their city; the achievement of peace, security, and self-

determination for the people of Darfur and the Congo; democracy and reconciliation in Zimbabwe and Kenya; and liberation and a decent life for the people of Haiti, whose building of their house of freedom still remains unfinished, even after centuries of struggle.

And there is the ongoing struggles to secure the necessities of life for our people everywhere—food, clothing, housing, health care, especially in the matter of HIV/AIDS, education for life and a living; freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation in every form; gender equality; and democracy which insures power of the masses of people over their destiny and daily lives and faith in a future they forge with their own minds, hearts and hands. Finally, there is the need for cancellation of debts, reparations and the end of resource theft, unequal trade relations, privatization of public space and wealth, and violations of the sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples of Africa, Haiti and throughout the world African community.

But at the beginning and end of this and every agenda, there must be struggle. Indeed, African liberation is both a personal and social practice of struggle against ourselves and the oppressor, a self- and social transformation in and thru struggle that frees the mind, strengthens the will and leads us to come forth without being called, to serve without calling it sacrifice, and to struggle unceasingly until freedom is so palpable that the masses of people can hold it in their hands and forge out of it any future they want in the most dignity-affirming and life-enhancing ways.

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