



**CELEBRATING US-ON-EARTH DAY:
REPARATIVE JUSTICE FOR US AND EARTH**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

A GAIN, THE CELEBRATION OF THIS YEAR'S EARTH DAY AND EARTH MONTH offers us, African peoples, and humanity as a whole an urgent invitation and opportunity to reflect on our relationship and responsibility to the health and well-being of the natural world. And we engage in this important practice, not only to demonstrate our moral understanding and appreciation of the intrinsic value of the earth, but also because, as we continuously maintain, the health and well-being of the world is profoundly and inseparably linked to that of our own and that of the whole of humanity.

Us-on-Earth Day is used in the title of this article to move the focus on Earth Day from simple focus on the earth, itself, and the one day donated to it. And I am using the concept Us-on-Earth Day to encourage us to focus on "us on earth", us living, and acting on earth, and either harming earth or living in ways that ensure and enhance the well-being of the earth and all on it and in it, including us.

Focus only on earth itself without explicit and continuous emphasis on *us on earth* makes it seem such a large and distant object even if we concede it is a subject and object of rightful concern. But the concept of Us-on-Earth invites and encourages us to ask and consider what on earth are we doing on earth and about earth? Also, Earth Day is a single day of celebration and all this involves, but Us-on-Earth Day suggests and requires an every-day consideration and concern. For we are either consciously and actively committed to the health and well-being of the earth or complicit in its degradation and destruction.

Moreover, as we talk of and struggle for reparations and reparative justice for ourselves, we must link them with our conversations and efforts of reparative justice for the earth. For again, the reparative justice for us, of necessity, involves reparative justice for the earth. We talk here about reparative justice that is designed and practiced to repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. For not only are we injured along with others on earth by degrading and destructive practices, but also we as vulnerable populations bear the greatest brunt of these earth-undermining practices in both a social, health and environmental sense. Thus, when Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune tells us "our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this", this urgent and insistent task is not only a social one, but also an ecological one with both requiring reparative initiatives.

Indeed, our honored ancestors teach us to recognize our place on earth and our responsibility to it, to care for it, protect it and preserve it. In the sacred text, *Odu Ifa*, they say that: "The world should stop making sacrifices for wealth and instead make sacrifices that would protect the earth from its enemies. In this way we will live. And so, we plead that as long as we live on earth that the earth not be destroyed". Here, our honored ancestors teach us that the earth is not only where we live but also how we ensure we live, and that our lives are inseparably linked to the well-being of the world. And they tell us we must struggle, even sacrifice, to protect the earth from its enemies so that it and we can live and continue to exist and also thrive.

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Now among the main enemies of the earth today are *plunder*, *pollution* and *depletion*, especially conducted by capitalist corporations with their ruthless commitment to profit and their will to ravish the earth and rob it of its riches without consideration of casualties or cost to the well-being of the world and all in it, including us. And here we see the link between the health of societies and its impact on the world and vice versa. We speak here not only about the physical health of societies which has impact on the world, but also their psychological health and its impact on the world.

For there is clearly a psychological disorder attached to a society or its rulers and controllers who willfully and knowingly degrade and destroy the very basis of their and our lives and existence, the earth, itself. It is this death dealing mentality that can commit both *ecocide* and *genocide* in broad daylight, pathologically lie about it, and deny it and then criminalize and seek to suppress those who reveal and resist this murderous madness. Indeed, where we see genocide being committed today, we also see ecocide, the simultaneous killing of flora and fauna, the poisoning and pollution of land, water and air and other savage atrocities against the world and all in it.

To escape collaborating in our own oppression and threatened extinction and the destruction of the planet, then, it is clear we must change our wicked, wayward and wait-and-see ways, change the way we relate, act and walk in the world. In other words, we must move as quickly as possible away from the human-centered and nature-dismissive ways so pervasive and pernicious in the world. Likewise, we must rethink and reject the corporate, consumerist and anti-life and anti-earth views, values and practices that

already are rapidly degrading and destroying our lives, the earth and our future as a people, species and planet.

This means, as we have continuously maintained, that we must engage in a radical rethinking of our conceptions or rather misconceptions of progress, a good life and a sustainable world. And drawing on the sacred teachings of our honored ancestors, we must constantly remember and remind ourselves that we are not only human beings (*watu*), but also world beings (*walimwengu*), and thus, we are responsible, not only for the well-being of our people and our species, but also, for the well-being of the world and all in it.

Thus, we are to work and struggle for an inclusive good within both the small and large circles of our lives. As our sacred texts tell and teach us, “When it comes our turn to take responsibility for the world, we should do good for the world”. And this means that we should “speak truth; do justice, be kind and do not do evil” to anyone or anything in and on the earth. In this way, the sacred texts say, we will live, continue to exist and flourish, and so will the world and all in it.

In the sacred texts of the *Husia*, the Kawaida Maatian concept and practice of *serudj ta* requires that in our relations with each other, other humans, and the natural world, we must constantly strive to repair, renew and remake ourselves and the world. We are to raise up that which is in ruins; to repair that which is damaged; to rejoin that which is severed; to replenish that which is depleted; to strengthen that which is weakened; to set right that which is wrong, and to make flourish that which is insecure and undeveloped.

Here again, the Kawaida Maatian ethical imperative of *serudj ta* is most relevant and urgent, for it requires that we repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and

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practice of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. It requires also that in doing this, we are to *relate rightly, act justly and walk gently in the world*. To relate rightly, we must make ourselves good relatives to all in the world, relatives that embrace the African ethical understanding and concept of the unity of being, the oneness of life, and the interrelatedness and interdependence of the whole world which necessarily includes us.

AND THUS, OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO DO GOOD in and for the world is morally imperative. To act justly in and for the

world and for ourselves is to relate rightly in ways that give everyone and everything in the world their rightful due, as respected and rightfully cared for relatives. And as we have said elsewhere, “to walk gently in the world means moving and asserting ourselves in the world without arrogance and abuse, without the corrosive and inconsiderate weight of overconsumption and waste, and without cooperating in the government sanctioned corporate plunder, pollution and depletion of the world”. ▲

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