



**RECENTERING THE MILLION MAN MARCH:
REMEMBERING THE PROMISE OF OPERATIONAL UNITY**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS OUR MEMORY AND THIS HISTORY IT CALLS to mind, that remind us of what we've done, who we are, where we are and what we must self-consciously do in continuously moving forward. The Million Man March/ Day of Absence is such a memory and history, and below is an excerpt from its Mission Statement which I was consensually chosen and honored to write, drawing from our collective discussions. Called together in Washington, D.C. by the Hon. Min. Louis Farrakhan, Nation of Islam, on October 16, 1995, we practiced and posed operational unity as a moral imperative for the liberation struggle which we are called and compelled to wage, internally and externally.

The Million Man March and Day of Absence are posed first in challenge to ourselves. We understand that the challenge to ourselves is the greatest challenge. For it is only by making demands on ourselves that we can make successful demands on society. In this regard we have raised three basic themes: Atonement, Reconciliation and Responsibility. For it is through being at one with the Creator, each other and creation, and reconciling our differences with each other, that we can stand up and together in unity, strength and dignity and accept and bear the responsibility heaven and history have placed on us at this critical juncture in the life and struggle of our people.

ATONEMENT. For us, atonement in the best spiritual and ethical sense is to recognize wrongs done and make amends, to be self-critical and self-corrective. It means turning inward and assessing the right and the wrong, recognizing shortcomings and committing oneself to correct them. Atonement means being always concerned about standing worthy before the Creator, before others and

before the creation, being bold enough to admit mistakes and wrongs and bold enough to correct them. We call then for a Holy Day of Atonement on this October 16, 1995, a day to meditate on and seek right relationships with the Creator, with each other and with nature. We call also for a special remembering of the ancestors on this day and honoring them by a renewed commitment to speak truth, do justice, resist evil and always choose the good, as they taught us through word and deed. To the extent that we have failed to do all we can in the way we can to make ourselves and our community the best of what it means to be African and human, we ask forgiveness from the Creator and each other.

And therefore, we dare to atone: a) for all our offenses, intentional and unintentional, against the Creator, others and the creation, especially those offenses caused by our accepting the worst and weakest conceptions of ourselves; b) for not always following the best teachings of our spiritual and ethical traditions of Islam, Christianity, Judaism (Hebrewism), Maat, Yoruba, Akan, Kawaïda and all others; and sacrificing and ignoring the spiritual and ethical in pursuit of material things; c) for over-focusing on the personal act at the expense of the collective needs of our families and our people; d) for collaborating in our own oppression by embracing ideas, institutions and practices which deny our human dignity, limit our freedom and dim or disguise the divinity in all of us; e) for failing to contribute in a sustained and meaningful way to the struggle of our people for freedom and justice, and to the building of the moral community in which we all want to live;

And f) for failing to do as much as we can to protect and preserve the environment

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through practicing and struggling for environmentally friendly patterns of consumption and production; g) for any time we have turned a blind eye to injustice, a deaf ear to truth or an uncaring heart away from the suffering and pain around us; h) for not resisting as much as we can sexist ideas and practices in society and in our own relations and failing to uphold the principle of equal rights, partnership and responsibility of men and women in life, love and struggle; i) for lacking the moral consideration and human sensitivity towards others that we want for ourselves; and j) for not always practicing the Seven Principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. And thus we commit and recommit ourselves on this day and afterwards to constantly strive to be better persons, live fuller and more meaningful lives, build strong, loving and egalitarian families, and struggle to make our community, society and the world a better place in which to live.

RECONCILIATION. We call also for reconciliation which is a companion practice of atonement. For it means, for us, to bring oneself into harmony with the Creator, others and creation. This means we call for all of us to settle disputes, overcome conflicts, put aside grudges and hatreds in our personal and social relationships and in and between our organizations and institutions in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, to reject and oppose communal, family and personal violence, and to strive to build and sustain loving, mutually respectful and reciprocal relations; in a word, to seek the good, find it, embrace it and build on it.

Reconciliation also means that we must strive for and achieve a principled and active unity for the common good. This we call

operational unity, a unity in diversity, a unity without uniformity, a unity on principle and in practice. We therefore commit and recommit ourselves to the principle and practice of reconciliation. For it is in and through reconciliation that we can embrace, stand together, organize our community and solve the problems in it, harness its energies for maximum development and struggle to end injustice and create the just and good society.

RESPONSIBILITY. Finally, we challenge each Black man, in particular, and the Black community in general to renew and expand our commitment to responsibility in personal conduct, in family relations and in obligations to the community and to the struggle for a just society and a better world. And for us, to be responsible is to willingly and readily assume obligations and duties; to be accountable and dependable. It means to stand up, stand together and stand in practice; to stand up in consciousness and commitment; to stand together in harmony and unity as men, as brothers, as women and sisters, as partners, as family and as community; and to stand in the practice of struggle, dedication, discipline, sacrifice and achievement; always building, doing good, resisting evil and constantly creating and embracing possibilities for fuller and more meaningful lives.

We thus commit and recommit ourselves to take personal and collective responsibility for our lives and the welfare and future of our families and our community. And we commit ourselves to stand up in knowledge and resolve, to stand together in principled and active unity and to stand up in moral and liberating practice. In raising the challenge of a new, renewed and expanded assumption of responsibility, we call on those Black men and women with greater means to shoulder greater responsibility; to invest in

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the community and transform it; and to avoid imitating the established order in its disdain for and blame of the poor and the vulnerable.

OUR OBLIGATION IS TO REMEMBER THE ancient moral teaching that we should give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked and a boat to the boatless, that we should be a father for the orphan, a

mother to the timid, a shelter for the battered, a staff of support for the aged, a companion and comforter of the ill, an aid to the poor, strength for the weak, a raft for the drowning and a ladder for those trapped in the pit of despair. In a word, we must love justice, hate wrongdoing, resist evil and always do the good.▲

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