



**THE MILLION MAN MARCH AND DAY OF ABSENCE:
RADICAL SOLIDARITY IN LIFE, LOVE AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

ALTHOUGH CLEARLY THE MILLION MAN March was the central event on October 16, 1995, it is important that we remember and always pay rightful homage to its parallel support project, the Day of Absence. Indeed, the *Mission Statement* is titled *The Million Man March/Day of Absence Mission Statement*. Moving to foreground the challenges faced by Black men and yet rightly place them in the context of community and partnership with Black women, after deep discussion we expanded the arc of inclusion, not only to involve women in the organizing committee, but also to support the building of a parallel initiative lead by Black women. Thus, we called on those who did not come to Washington, especially, Black women, to mobilize and organize the community in support of the March and the goals of the Black liberation struggle.

We stated in the *Mission Statement* that the “The Day of Absence is a parallel activity to the Million Man March and a component part of one joint and cooperative project: the standing up and assumption of a new and expanded responsibility by the Black man in particular and the Black community in general. Women are in the leadership of the Day of Absence without exclusion of men as men are in the leadership of the Million Man March without exclusion of women. And both activities are equally essential”. Those actively involved were to stay away from work, school, businesses, and from places of entertainment and sports and focus on the themes of atonement, reconciliation and responsibility in our lives and struggle.

We called for teach-ins at homes and in community gatherings on the meaning of the Million Man March, the Day of Absence, the

goals of this joint project and the importance and requirements of our struggle for liberation and justice; the indispensability of spiritual and ethical grounding in our families, communities and struggle; the central lessons of our history; and finally for “*a massive voter registration as an essential act of responsibility for being politically active and morally engaged persons, profoundly committed to the improvement of the quality of life in the community and larger society*”. Below is a position paper by the sisters of the Senut Society: A Sisterhood of the World African Community, the women of our organization, the African American Cultural Center (Us), who with other Black women in Los Angeles and around the country, organized and led the Day of Absence.

“We, the women of the Senut Society and the Organization Us, stand in ongoing solidarity with Black men in life and struggle and are supporters, participants and partners in the joint project of the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. and the Day of Absence throughout the country on this day, October 16, 1995. The Day of Absence is a holy day, a sacred day, a day of atonement, reconciliation and responsibility. We see the March and Day of Absence as a necessary challenge to ourselves and the country at a critical point in history in which this country has embraced the negative and we must struggle to achieve the positive. As our philosophy Kawaida says, we must resist and struggle against all forms of oppression and establish a model of the best of what it means to be both African and human.

We maintain that to put forth this model of excellence, we must mobilize, organize and direct in positive ways the collective

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energies of our people, that we must build family and community, and that we must stand together as one against the regressive forces of this country. And we see the March and Day of Absence as a historic opportunity to lay groundwork for the harnessing of our collective energies. From the inception of the call for the March, we along with other women and men across the country have carried on discussions about the meaning of the March, the form it should take and how it fit in our struggle to build family and community and end our oppression as a people. We were concerned that the March and the activities and discussions surrounding it represented the best of our tradition as a people in struggle.

Therefore, we along with other women and men across the country worked hard to expand the original conception of the March so that: a) the priority focus on men in no way suggested the exclusion or lack of concern for women; b) that women at all times were viewed and treated as equals and partners in the efforts to strengthen family and community and wage a successful struggle for liberation of our people; c) and that a joint project be created in which this equality and cooperative partnership were expressed. From the extensive exchange at the local level and in national meetings, we of Us and other women and men with similar concerns expanded the idea of the Day of Absence so that it became an essential part of the overall project of standing up and assuming a new and expanded responsibility by Black men in particular and the Black community in general.

We made a significant input into the formulation of the mission statement which summarizes the best of our thoughts as a people concerned about the state of the world in which we live and the impact of this on the

quality of our lives. We especially stressed the need for a moral vision of society and Black male-female relations which upholds the equal rights, role and responsibility of Black women and men in the life and struggle of our people.

Therefore, we accept the *Million Man March/Day of Absence Mission Statement* and the challenges, goals, and ongoing projects which it puts forth as representative of our views and concerns, our input and the collective process in which the document was created. As the *Mission Statement* says, "unless and until Black men stand up, Black men and women cannot stand together and accomplish the awesome tasks before us". We applaud the gathering of men in Washington for standing up, making commitments to be better persons, build stronger families and struggle to bring into being a just society and a better world. We applaud the assembling of women in the community to mobilize, organize and conduct teach-ins around the larger meaning of the March and Day of Absence. And we share the common commitment of Black women and men to strengthen ourselves, our families and community and move as one in life and struggle for the greater good.

Our support of our brothers comes from our need to see them responsible, principled, active, committed and strong enough to make and keep commitments, to live full and meaningful lives and build equal, loving and mutually-respectful relations with Black women. It is also based on our sense of mutual obligation to be sensitive to each other's needs, to share each other's dreams and aspirations and work together to create and maintain all good things. We support male projects for the same reason we support female projects: it is a positive practice of our culture

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and tradition to create structures and processes for women and men to bond with other women and men, to speak to the challenges and aspirations of their particular gender and to address issues together in sisterhood and brotherhood. In this regard, the Million Man March is led by men, but women are not excluded, and the Day of Absence is led by women, but men are not excluded. And as the *Mission Statement* says both activities are equally essential.

In conclusion, we embrace and support the brotherhood that gathers at the March as the brothers embrace and support the

sisterhood that mobilizes, organizes and conducts the teach-ins on the Day of Absence. We take the position that the well-being of our people and their capacity for successful struggle depend on our working together as sisters and brothers as equals and partners. As our *Mission Statement* says, our task is "to build an empowered community, a just society and a better world" together as mutually supportive partners in love and struggle. And we take up this task, fully aware that our very future depends on it."▲

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