

## Buddhist Statement on Racial Justice

May 14, 2015

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*“If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together.” – Lila Watson*

As Buddhist teachers and leaders we are distressed and deeply saddened by the killings of unarmed African-Americans by police—most recently brought to light with Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, Walter Scott in North Charleston, SC, Freddie Gray of Baltimore MD and too many others—and the frequent failure of the courts to bring justice to these cases. Most grievous is that these tragic events are not isolated incidents. They are part of a systemic injustice in the United States that is rooted in centuries of slavery and segregation, and manifested in continued economic and social exclusion, inferior education, mass incarceration and ongoing violence against African-Americans.

The Buddhist teachings are grounded in a clear recognition of suffering, an ethical commitment to non-harming and an understanding of interdependence: We can't separate our personal healing and transformation from that of our larger society. The historic and continued suffering of people of color in this country—of African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and others—is our collective suffering. The harm caused daily is our collective responsibility. Once we see this suffering, our freedom unfolds as we respond with a wise and compassionate heart.

Right now, we believe there is an immediacy and urgency in focusing our attentions and efforts on the pervasive and ongoing violence done to people of color in our country. We are inspired by the courage and leadership of the people of Ferguson and many other communities in recent months in drawing a line in the sand and saying, “Enough”, “Black Lives Matter”, and calling for deep-rooted changes in our economic and justice systems. As Buddhists we see the timeliness of adding our voices to theirs, knowing it will take a dedicated focus to recognize how the hidden biases and assumptions of our society deprive people of color of their basic rights to justice, opportunity and human dignity.

Our collective aspiration within the Buddhist traditions is to become truly inclusive and beloved communities. In this process we are committed to honestly and bravely uncovering the ways we create separation and unintentionally replicate patterns of inequity and harm. In the same spirit, we are committed to engaging with other faith and social justice groups in support of undoing racism throughout our society.

In response to tragedy, grief, and anger, we see the seeds of profound possibilities for healing the wounds of separation and building communities based on respect and love. Since their inception,

Buddhist teachings and practices have been explicitly devoted to liberation. In his time the Buddha was a revolutionary voice against racism and the caste system: “Not by caste, race, or creed, or birth is one noble, but by heart alone is one a noble being.” The Buddhist trainings in mindfulness, wisdom and compassion, create the grounds for wise speech and wise action. These teachings and practices free our hearts from greed, prejudice and hate and serve an essential role in societal healing, and in the awakening of all.

We offer prayers for healing and peace.

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