

**Remarks from Ibrahim Abdil-Mu'id Ramey to the NPT Civil Society
Assembly at Riverside Church. Manhattan, NY- April 30th, 2010**

In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful:

**Friends, distinguished delegates, members of the international activist
community, and leaders in the global struggle for the abolition of all
nuclear weapons:**

**It is a great honor for me to stand before you today, as a person of faith
and an advocate of nonviolence and disarmament, and to share with you
some of my ideas about the relationship between the global movement for
nuclear abolition and the central message of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther
King, Jr.**

**We have heard this great message, and we come from communities around
the globe, to gather here in New York to continue to press on in the name
of peace. We are veterans of the direct actions at nuclear weapons test
sites, and at the military bases from which these engines of mass killings
might be launched. We have made sacred pilgrimages to the sites of the
horrific atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We have assembled to
shut down the laboratories involved in senseless and immoral research to
maintain the nuclear danger for the sake of paychecks for scientists, and
more profit from the altar of the god of militarism that they serve.**

**I am aware, as are all of you, that a little more than 43 years ago, Dr. King
stood at the pulpit of this very church to articulate his opposition to the
U.S. war in Indochina. His prophetic words were heard then by many,
some of whom wished that his message could have been limited to the
realm of the fight for racial justice.**

**War has not yet been abolished, any more that economic injustice and
racial oppression have ceased to exist over the last four decades of human
history.**

**But as I witness the sight of you-hundreds of my fellow abolitionists and
nonviolent workers for the abolition of nuclear weapons- I am reminded
that we are not here simply among each other; We, the living, are joined
by a cloud of prophetic witnesses:**

The lives of the hundreds of thousands of incinerated human beings in

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are here with us.

The untold victims of the horrors of radiation poisoning in the Marshall Islands, and in the nuclear test sites of Semipalatinsk and Nevada, are with us.

The generations of indigenous communities that are scarred and wounded from contaminated water, soil, and air are with us;

The children of Pakistan and India, and even Russia and China and the United States condemned to lives of brutal poverty and neglect because of the twisted priorities of militarism and the insanity of a continued arms race, are with us.

And the enormous spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. is with us as well.

We call to mind the words of our nation's most noble Apostle of Peace that we are, indeed, bound together inextricably in a garment of mutual destiny. Never before, in the history of human life on this planet, have so many billions of souls been inter-connected in a common destiny because of the single, transcendent threat of global annihilation posed by the intentional or accidental detonation of atomic weapons.

And indeed, it is more true now than it has ever been that our choice, as inhabitants of this fragile planet, is not the choice of violence versus nonviolence, but that of nonviolence versus nonexistence.

But while the moral imperative for abolition remains unchanged in the 42 years since the assassination of Dr. King, it behooves us to consider both how the specific nature of that threat has changed, and how the challenges facing us as a global abolition community have changed as well.

The old bipolar world of Dr. King's lifetime, dominated by Soviet and U.S. power has been radically transformed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, by the addition of new nation states to the nuclear weapons club, and by the proliferation of new generations of tactical nukes and the real, and growing, threat of the possession of these weapons by terrorists.

These complex new relationships and changing geopolitical realities require the same steadfast commitment to our unchanging vision of a world made safer from the threat of nuclear war. But these new

challenges also compel us to re-examine our forms of organization and the way in which we convey our essential message to the world.

We acknowledge that the NPT was a major and positive step in the direction of the eventual abolition of all weapons, and that the evolving body of international law plays a central role in what must become a different, and more hopeful, future for our species and our planet.

Dr. King was aware of the need for new laws to govern the conduct of individuals and nations and the nations of the world, but changing laws, while necessary, is never sufficient. What was necessary for Dr. King and Mahatma Gandhi, and what is taught by great living moral teachers like the Dalai Llama and Daisaku Ikeda, is nothing less than the moral re-education of global civilization itself, rooted in the great tradition of nonviolence.

The prize that we must continue to keep our eyes on is nothing less than a complete spiritual transformation of the human community, and one that must be led not by governments or changing international agreements, but by civil society itself. And WE are that civil society!

What took place in the U.S. civil rights struggle, and what must continue to take place in our own work, is the passionate, relentless, and uncompromising struggle for the human soul, linked with the political and tactical wisdom that comes from our triumphs as well as our failures, and from recognizing which winds have shifted, and which continue to blow.

The social movement with which Dr. King is intimately connected is, of course, the movement for civil rights and racial equality in America. But that movement, in the most comprehensive and holistic sense, was a struggle that linked together an analysis of, and a response to, **THREE forms of oppression: racism, economic class oppression, and militarism.**

It is not possible to truncate King's analysis and conveniently pigeon-hole his vision into only one form of social protest, because all three of these evils are inseparable. And the lesson to all of us is clear: we cannot simply oppose nuclear weapons. We must be front-line activists in linking the issue of abolition to the broader issue of anti-militarism and opposition to the global war system itself, with a deep concern for racial and economic justice for the oppressed peoples of the earth.

Anything less than this places us in the middle of the cynical and intellectually dishonest form of policy-oriented elitism that says, in effect: why kill them with nukes, when massive numbers of conventional weapons are cheaper and less radioactive? Or: Let's have a strategic arms control agreement and fill one of our bombers with 20 nuclear warheads, but count it as only ONE weapon. Or: Let's promise to stop developing new generations of these weapons, but keep pumping tens of billions of dollars into the laboratories that design them. Or: It's OK for some countries to have nuclear weapons, but we'll invade the ones who have them that we don't like.

Our work, like the example of Dr. King's life, must always be guided by moral integrity.

And even when we see incremental progress in areas like arms reduction of more stringent international control of fissionable material, let us be clear that we demand nothing less than the total eradication of nuclear weapons from our planet.

I am reminded that the King we should remember in celebrate was not a made-for-television "dreamer", or a convenient icon trotted out every January to soothe the conscience of a nation that still struggles with violence, racism and social equality. The Martin Luther King that I bring before us today was a man of nonviolence and deep faith, but essentially, he was a revolutionary.

His instruments of struggle included the logical argument of morality and the transcendent and timeless message of scriptural prophesy, indeed. But there is also another message: we must learn that our victory over nuclear terror will only come when we have organized properly to make it happen.

And it is in this call for the renewed, and re-visioned organizing of our movement, that I suggest that the deeper understanding of Dr. King and his social movement might be of great benefit to us.

King was, of course, only one important leader and actor in this struggle. Many other men, and most importantly, women, played key tactical and strategic roles in bringing down the walls of the American legal Apartheid system.

But who were these people? They were Black and White and Asian and

native American and Latino, sharecroppers and professors, students and old folks, Southern Christians and Northern secularists, the educated elite and the illiterate, Baptists and Catholics and Jews and, I suspect, even a few Muslims.

They came from every location and social stratum of the United States. But they intentionally built a movement that was inclusive and broadly reflective of the complex social mosaic of this nation, and this world.

And if we are to achieve the abolition of nuclear weapons in our lifetime, our movement , both here in American and throughout the world, must be intentionally speak to all, be open to all, and avoid the trappings of elitism and exclusivity that often prevent us from building the critical mass of popular support that we need.

If retired military generals from around the world can be allies in the global campaign for abolition, let's understand that poor Black and Brown people from Harlem, or Indigenous people from Arizona and New Mexico, can be allies-and leaders-as well!

As a Muslim-American activist, I am proud that my own organization took the initiative to sponsor, in Congress, a hearing on the issue of nuclear abolition that featured prominent Christian and Muslim authorities on this issue. The Christian community has a long and proud history of anti-nuclear organizing work, but the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation is, in fact, the only national Muslim advocacy organization that is advancing a position in support of abolition and the overall demilitarization of the United States economy.

We cannot do it alone. We need all of you. And all of us need a humanity that is ready to end the nuclear danger for all of the peoples of the earth. Our faith in God, in morality, and in the beloved global community that Dr. King envisioned compel us to build deeper connections of solidarity and mutuality.

In conclusion, I would like to dedicate these remarks to the memory of the Elder Corbin Harney of the Western Shoshone people of the United States. His deep compassion and wisdom animate all of us, and his legacy is a huge one that continues to inspire me.

I pray that the spirit, the work, and the vision of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. will abide with us and guide our intellectual, prophetic, and organizing work for the noble aim of a world free of oppression, injustice, and above all, weapons of mass destruction.

We, too, have dreams to dream.

We have work to do.

We have a world to transform.

Let us get busy!

Thank you.