



**SEEKING JUSTICE OR ELSE:
A PREDICTION AND PROMISE OF RIGHTEOUS STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Although we of Us supported the Justice or Else! 20th Anniversary of the Million Man March and I had participated in the early planning and organizing initiatives and had been invited to speak, Tiamoyo and I were not able to attend due to unforeseen circumstances. Below are some remarks I would have made, if we had been able to attend as originally intended.

On behalf of our organization Us, which this year celebrates its 50th Anniversary of work, service, struggle and institution-building, I bring you greetings of steadfast solidarity and righteous and relentless struggle. We assure you that among us, you will always find your family and a peaceful place, and we wish for you all blessings without number and all good things without end. Moreover, we bear witness as an African people that as our beginning was a great and good, so shall our development throughout eternity be, if we dare struggle, speak truth, do justice and walk in the way of righteousness. *Hotep. Ase. Heri.*

On this 20th Anniversary of the Million Man March/Day of Absence, let us begin by paying rightful homage to Min. Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam for calling us to struggle at that historic moment 20 years ago and at this important gathering today, for bringing us together in such large numbers and urging us to demonstrate a determination, defiance and commitment to struggle that our demand, “Justice or Else” requires. Min. Farrakhan and we who are assembled here, and the millions who support the struggle for justice around the world have focused on the demand for justice. We come here to this place again, this critical site and city to address the country and the world, to register our rightful and relentless resistance to the ongoing injustice of the oppression practiced against us and to reaffirm we will have justice or else there will and must be consequences. We come here as self-conscious and struggle-committed off-

spring of ancient ancestors who charged us to “bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice”, the devalued, the violated, the marginalized, the socially maimed and grossly mistreated.

For justice is an essential human need and right. It is a life-giving life-enhancing principle and practice. Indeed, our ancestors teach us in our sacred text, the *Husia*, that “doing justice is breath to the nose”. Justice is what we are due as human beings in every area of life. It is thus not simply a legal principle or procedure or conformity to the law, but a moral principle by which we measure the law, itself, and support or oppose it. Indeed, as our struggle and the struggles for civil and human rights throughout history teach us, there are cases of oppression, i.e., enslavement, segregation, apartheid, lynching, tyranny, genocide and holocaust, in which the only just course and the way to achieve justice is by disobeying the law. That is to say, we refuse to collaborate in our own legalized oppression or be silent and submissive in the injustice imposed on us. Justice is also a relational concept, directing our rightful relations with each other, teaching us our obligations and calling us and reminding us of the ancient ancestral teaching that the good we do for others we’re also doing for ourselves. For we are building the just and moral community and world we all want and deserve to live in. Thus, our sacred ancestral text, the *Odu Ifa* instructs us to “speak truth, do justice, be kind and do not do evil”.

Moreover, our ancestors teach us in the *Husia* that “the true balancing of the world lies in doing justice”. They say to us that when justice is not done, the world is unbalanced, insecure, out of alignment and prone toward chaos, senseless suffering, unchecked oppression, conflict, war and the waste of human life and life of all kinds and great harm to the

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world itself. Thus, when we are asked what does the “else” in “Justice or Else” mean, we ask them what can the absence of justice mean on one hand except chaos, conflict and exploitation, senseless and underserved suffering, needless degradation, death and destruction, and the advance towards the abyss? And on the other hand, what can it mean except that if we are human, we will act as all others and righteously and relentlessly resist injustice, oppression, exploitation and degradation? And we will also, as we have done throughout history, join other oppressed and struggling people to bring the world into rightful balance and start a new history of humankind.

Thus, the battle cry “Justice or Else” like that of “No Justice No Peace” is a prediction and promise of things to come: a prediction of a world of oppression and chaos unchecked and a promise of righteous and relentless struggle to end it. *We are born in dignity and must defend it. We are born in freedom and must secure it. And we are born with a compelling sense of justice and must honor and uphold it in life and struggle.*

We need justice everywhere in the country and in the world. *We need justice* in the streets and the courts where our oppressor unjustly and coldly kills and confines us under the camouflage and color of law. *We need justice* in those barren and brutal stretches of human habitation we call prisons where they dump us in great numbers and murder and maim us as official policy and socially sanctioned practice. *We need justice* in Congress, the city councils, the boards of supervisors and the state legislatures. *We need justice* in our schools, in housing and health care, employment, ownership and environmental considerations, and the in policies that aid in this. *And we need justice*, strengthened and in-

formed by love, kindness and caring, in our neighborhoods, homes and relationships, so that we can live in principled, peaceful and caring togetherness, build strong families and communities, and stand as an unbreakable wall and self-conscious force of righteous resistance to injustice everywhere.

Surely, *we need justice* too in the world for everyone, especially for the vulnerable peoples of the world, the oppressed and occupied, the dominated, deprived and degraded. *We need justice* for Africans—on the continent and in diaspora, especially for Haiti and the Haitian people; for Palestine and the Palestinian people; for Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, Native Australians and all the native peoples of the world suffering under the spiked heel of conquest, occupation and open and disguised policies of national and ethnic erasure.

Given this, we know that in spite of the seductive siren songs of the established order, the fight is not finished, the war is not won, and the goals of the ongoing struggle have not yet been achieved. For still the oppressed want freedom; the wronged and injured want justice; the people want power over their destiny and daily lives; and the world wants peace.

Let us go from here, then, with this urgent challenge and awesome task that reaches across the ages and informs us in life and struggle. It is this: continue the struggle; keep the faith; hold the line; love and respect our people and each other; seek and speak truth; do and demand justice; be constantly concerned with the well-being of the world and all in it; and rebuild the Movement that prefigures and makes possible the good world we all want and deserve, and work and struggle to bring into being.

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