



THE BAHÁ'Í CHAIR
FOR WORLD PEACE

Policing and Racism

On June 8, 2020, Hoda Mahmoudi, Research Professor and Chair, The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace gave a statement at the opening of the town hall meeting on Policing and Racism in America. The town hall was sponsored by the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, University of Maryland, College Park.

Dear Friends,

I greet you with a heavy heart, with a heart scarred by the lesions of hate and discrimination, and with a heart angered over the systems which support a kind of lurking evil.

I greet you as a person in need – of answers, of pathways forward, of hope.

And I greet you as a fellow worker, determined to play a part, any part that I am allowed, to help right this ship, before the time is passable that it cannot be saved.

One simply cannot imagine a new peace without new policing, and one cannot imagine new policing without a new peace.

Policing is not the creation of peace, it is the preservation of peace. It aligns itself with the goals, values, and preferences of communities that already exist. Police are not to dictate – they are not dictators – they are to act through organized, statutory consent – a consent of the people, by the decree of the people, for the benefit of the people.

In order to secure peace, the police must abide within the unspoken platforms of consent and practice. These platforms, when performed well, support the bridge of peace we all must cross.

Peace arises not from being ruled, but from when those in authority obey the rules. Lawlessness at the top spreads outwardly. Lawlessness must be called out where it first occurs.

Peace isn't an agreement between unequal parties, peace is a coalition of equal parties – of communities striving for an accurate, helpful arrangement. Policing must follow community standards and be informed by history, policy, and the legacy of racism; it must be sensitive, deferential, careful, and supportive. Policing must honor pre-existing communities, and should look to shore up, build up, and continue with the work already being done in these communities.

I do not understand what it is like to be a black man, or to be a black woman, in this country. I do not know what it is like to walk in another's shoes.

But I do know wrong when I see it.

It is wrong that those individuals charged with our protection become a menace.

It is wrong when some of us are constrained in intolerable ways.

It is wrong when some people's movements are tightly regulated.

It is wrong that the cost of being black in this country is astronomically, dangerously, unimaginably high.

It is wrong that some people's lives are seen as less than, unworthy of fair and just treatment.

But let me also say this.

It is wrong to wait too long.

It is wrong to pause before justice.

It is wrong to sit idly by.

Here is a quote so many of you know (quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.):

“When you see hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters...then you will understand why we find it so difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.”

Legitimate and unavoidable impatience is not a moral evil, it is a moral good. Impatience with injustice is a righteous act. Impatience with injustice is a loving act. Impatience with injustice is a hopeful act. Impatience with injustice is a God-fearing act.

A determination to change – to change the way bodies, minds, and hearts are policed – is a determination to change the future. A determination to change is a determination to preserve and sanctify the lives of those who have been killed.

George Floyd.

Breonna Taylor.

So many others.

For peace to ever occur, *we ourselves* must demand that policing change. To care about peace is to insist upon this. We can tolerate nothing less. A peaceful future is a God-given hope, but the battle for peace lies in our hands.

It must be won.

You can view the video of the town hall event [here](#).