

On the 35th anniversary of the killing of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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They killed Martin Luther King 35 years ago today. They killed him but they could not kill his voice. They could not erase his words. They did not rob us of his spirit. They could not rob us of his spirit.

And from Dr. King's voice, his words, and his loving and wise spirit, we know what Dr. King would say with regards to this war, this invasion against Iraq.

We also know because of what he said about the US invasion against Vietnam.

"I am convinced," Dr King said, "that it is one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world. Our involvement in the war ... has torn up the Geneva Accord. It has strengthened the military-industrial complex; it has strengthened the forces of reaction in our nation. ...It has played havoc with our domestic destinies. ...it has put us in a position of appearing to the world as an arrogant nation. ... We have alienated ourselves from other nations so we end up morally and politically isolated in the world."

Is he not talking about Iraq?

"All the while," Dr. King said, "the people read our leaflets and received our regular promises of peace and democracy. Now they languish under our bombs and consider us the real enemy."

Could he not have been talking about Iraq now?

It is an illegal war, this war the Bush administration and our silent Congress have pushed this country into. It is an unnecessary war. It is a war whose goals were ever-changing – first they tell us disarmament – but inspections were working; then they tell us terrorism, but they could find no link, and the CIA stated that terrorism would increase if they were to go to war; so then they tell us this joke called 'liberation.' To 'liberate' the people by bombing them at a rate of 1 bomb every 50 seconds. To 'liberate' people by killing them in their market places, in their mosques and churches.

It is no liberation they are planning. They are planning an occupation. An old-fashioned colonial occupation. They have told us so clearly. The Bush administration wants to have each of the 23 ministries in Iraq controlled by an American, enforced by the US military, and with the US government appointing Iraqis as advisors. And they want to call it democracy.

We don't even have a decent democracy here at home! Will the administration that stole the election, that robbed African-Americans of their right to vote, will this administration give anyone a democracy?

War is not a game. War is not a discussion of different ideologies. War is the killing of people. That is what happens in war – people kill people. We seem to forget that

This invasion, this premeditated act of aggression, has already taken lives. 43 American soldiers. 27 British soldiers. And the Iraqis. At least 574 Iraqis killed. Thousands injured. Hundreds of thousands endangered. Why? I ask you, why?

A few days ago, in a small, overcrowded hospital in southern Iraq, two young children tried to comfort their screaming infant sister. With tears running down his cheeks, a brave nine-year-old Ahmad hugged his young sister. His little brother caressed the crying baby's head. These three little children were orphaned after a bombing killed 33 civilians, most of them women and children, and wounded about 400 others.

What do we tell these children?

What do we tell Bakhat Hassan's family? His daughters, aged two and five, his three-year-old son, his parents, two older brothers, their wives and two nieces aged 12 and 15 – they were all killed by US fire at a checkpoint. 11 members of his family – killed by US fire. They waved at the soldiers as they were passing the checkpoint – in their own city! The soldiers didn't wave back. They fired.

"I saw the heads of my two little girls come off," Hassan's heavily pregnant wife, Lamea, 36, said numbly. "My girls - I watched their heads come off their bodies. My son is dead."

They were fleeing their farm town southeast of Karbala, where US attack helicopters had fired missiles and rockets the day before. "We had hope," Hassan said. "But then you Americans came to bring us democracy and our hope ended."

What do we say to Hassan and his pregnant wife?

What do we tell the children? Half of Iraq's population are children under the age of 15. What do we tell them as their homes and cities are bombed, and their families are torn apart by death and injury?

What do we tell the families of the 43 American soldiers and the 27 British soldiers who have been killed thus far in this war for oil, for military domination, and for empire?

We tell them that we will not be silenced.

We tell them that we will not be silenced by our fear or by our grief. We will not be silenced by the false cries of 'patriotism.' We will not meekly or quietly line up behind the President. We will not render our support to a war that should never have begun and needs to end immediately.

We tell them that it is in support of the troops that we protest this war. It is because WE support the troops, that we value their lives, and not only their deaths. It is because WE support the troops, that we want them returned home, safely, with their spirits unbroken and their bodies unharmed.

America's soul is in danger. Will we rush to heal our nation? Will we change the path of our country from one of continual violence for the pursuit of economic and military domination? Will we rise up to claim our country, and, in so doing, finally claim the freedom and justice that is ours?

One day before he was killed, Dr. King gave us his 'I've been to the mountaintop' speech. He said, and I have modified it slightly, Dr. King told us: [modified] "Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Jerusalem, Palestine; Baghdad, Iraq, New York City, NY; Memphis, TN; or Raleigh, NC, the cry is always the same: We Want to Be Free."

We want to be free

Free to learn – instead of being forced to join the military to get an education.

Free to work – instead of being forced to join the military because it is the only job available

Free to make informed decisions – instead of being given the same party-line by all the corporate-run media operations

Free to have health care – instead of having 44 million fellow Americans deprived of this RIGHT

We want to be free

And we will not be free until the chains of materialism are broken.

We will not be free until the chains of militarism are broken

We want to be free

And we will not be free until there is an end to racism.

The institutional racism that still runs this country. The racism that steals the liberty of too many black men and women.

And the racism that makes the life of a black son less worthy than the life of a white son, and the life of an Arab son the least worth of all.

just like Ella Baker said –

until the killing of a black man, black mother's son, is as important as the killing of a white man, white mother's son

let me add to that

until the killing of an arab man, arab mother's son, is as important as the killing of a black man, as the killing of a white man

The safety of Iraqi people – and the people of every country – are no less than the safety of Americans. The life of a U.S. soldier is no less valuable than the life of an Iraqi soldier, woman, man or child.

just like Ella Baker said –

we who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes

and just like another leader for liberation said:

“Because lack of freedom makes us the same

Because we are united in the racism we suffer within and across borders

Because the war they impose on us -- on all of us -- makes us comrades, companeros an companeras.

Because we no longer want this kind of world

Because we no longer want crime celebrated

Because we no longer want falsehood treated as a virtue

Because we no longer want others to impose their forms of being and thinking on us

We want to be free

And the only way to be free is to be so together. This is why we want to be free and in solidarity.

We won't remain silent

We'll stand fast.

We'll struggle

We'll build another world

A better one

Bigger

Better

One in which all worlds can fit.”

We are not here to remember Martin Luther King's words as words of the past. Or his dream as a dream of the past. The struggle continues.

We are here to organize. We are here to organize. We are here to make his dream a reality. We are here to make our dream a reality.