

January 18, 2021

Dear Members and Supporters,

I thought I would share a few thoughts and hopes to commemorate the day that honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights leader and one of the most inspirational thinkers of the 20th century.

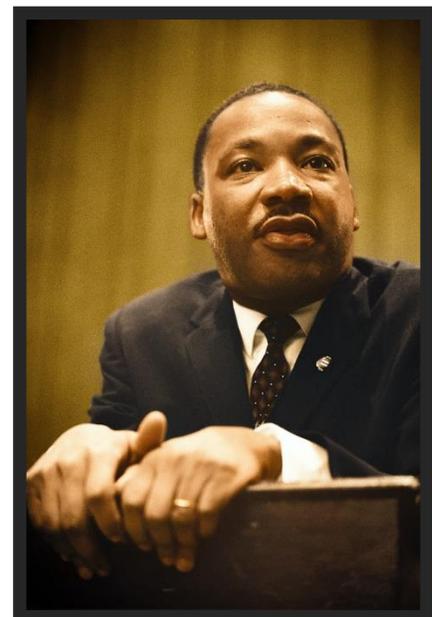


As physicians and advocates for a healthier world, we at Greater Boston PSR are concerned about the serious risks to human health posed by nuclear weapons and the climate crisis. The recent tests of four intercontinental ballistic missiles from a nuclear powered submarine by Russia on December 12th amplify these concerns; but so does the massive contamination from uranium mining and weapons development in this country that has needlessly exposed indigenous communities, communities of color and environmental justice communities to cancer-causing radioactivity for decades. We are equally concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis that helped create it — as well as the disproportionate effect of both on our most vulnerable communities due to the compounding effects of air pollution on the mortality and transmissibility of the virus.

These issues are intertwined and interconnected. No one was more keenly aware of these interconnections than Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He wrote: "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly... We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality."

Dr. King was deeply opposed to the concept of nuclear war. I recently learned from my fellow PSR member, Dr. Martha Ellen Katz, that the Black community in this country was among the first to call out the racism of US nuclear policy, including the US colonial exploitation of the Congo for uranium extraction, which left behind a toxic legacy for that poorest of countries to manage. Langston Hughes called out the racism of dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Dr. King joined a coalition of NAACP members opposing nuclear war; he wrote, because "...it would be rather absurd to work to get schools and lunch counters integrated and not be concerned with the survival of a world in which to integrate;" the devastation wreaked by nuclear weapons, he added, represented a degree of hell that "even the mind of Dante could not envision."

That racism continues today in our continued development of nuclear weapons that pollutes the water of indigenous communities such as the Spokane in Washington state. It continues in our failure to address climate change, and the recent veto by our own Governor of Massachusetts of a climate bill that would have strengthened environmental protections for



communities of color; in our failure to properly address the COVID pandemic in communities of color.

MLK wrote that “The ultimate measure of man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy...We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for ... the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create a hell for the poor....There will be no meaningful solution until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries.”

Massachusetts has its work cut out for it in this regard: in particular, to learn to listen to our local communities and be protective of human health, rather than rubber stamp development projects for the oil and gas companies that are the very drivers of climate change. The federal government is equally tone-deaf to these cries: it has spent billions of dollars this year on nuclear weapons instead of on public health in the midst of the worst pandemic in a century.

What the current pandemic, nuclear weapons development and deployment, and the climate crisis all have in common is that they are about preventable deaths and the disproportionate burden of those deaths on communities of color. Yet the consequences of all three affect all of us, universally — because we are all inter-related, as Dr. King so eloquently said. We have wrongly accepted sacrificing the lives of indigenous tribes, and people of color, and immigrant and environmental justice communities, by continuing to ignore these consequences.

Which is regrettable, since for each problem, there are clear, unambiguous steps that can be taken to save lives.

What do I hope for 2021?

Nuclear weapons and contamination — To see every community in the Commonwealth renounce nuclear weapons, whose production destabilizes the world and hurts the health of every community they come in contact with; and to see our federal government ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, forbidding the development and deployment of nuclear weapons that goes into effect on the 22nd of this month.

Climate crisis — To see Massachusetts move beyond its love affair with fossil fuels, invest in wind, solar and geothermal energy, and strengthen protections against the soil, water and air pollution caused by the oil and gas industry; to advocate for the adoption of more strict air pollution standards and enforcement of the Clean Air Act.

COVID crisis — which is a result of the climate crisis: To see our government in Massachusetts properly treat the COVID-19 pandemic as the public health emergency that it is and adequately implement and fund combating it with traditional non-pharmaceutical interventions and an effective, coordinated and equitable vaccine distribution effort.

In the end, what I take away from Martin Luther King is his tremendous optimism in the face of the challenges he confronted and the courage that he showed in tackling them. I think our grand-kids will think better of us for emulating his courage by standing up for the health of all of our communities. I encourage our membership, collectively and individually in whatever role we play, to

continue to speak out, as Martin Luther King, Jr. did, so that our kids will be proud of us and so that they have a world to inherit.

Yours in the common pursuit,



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