

On Behalf of the day laborers, domestic workers, home care workers, laundry, and debris cleaners, who are the diaspora of the world economy,

On Behalf of the young people, who feel the difference between right and wrong in their veins, and who inherit our world,

On Behalf of the elders, whose bodies we must care for, and whose wisdom we must not lose,

On Behalf of harmony and dignity and the integrity of human life,

In the name of a decency that we still have time to salvage,

We must recognize that the developments in Arizona are the manifestation of a profound and growing sickness, toxicity, in the hearts and minds of our nation, promoted by a hateful few.

We recognize the loss of certainty by many, particularly White and working people, in the United States. The economy, politics, and culture are in a state of turbulence. Fear is easily channeled to hatred and blame. We understand, but we must resist this urge.

We recognize that the passage of Arizona state law SB 1070 represents a qualitative shift in this toxic state. Its passage is a clear signal to the people of Arizona, the United States, and to people throughout the world, that state sanctioning of racial, ethnic, and class segregation and degeneration is acceptable.

The lines have been drawn. But no person of good conscience can allow this to solidify in our collective consciousness or become socially acceptable. The law mandates interrogation based on racial perception – specifically targeting Latinos and those who ‘appear’ Mexican, Central American, and/or of indigenous ancestry. It puts them in the crosshairs of an increasingly militarized and policed state. It makes their existence in the state suspect; an illegal act to exist. The profound cruelty and irony of the measure is this: Arizona and its neighboring states are the ancestral homelands of these very peoples. They are the dispossessed and dehumanized within the lands that they are native to. They are here as workers, dependents of an economy that they were forced into, because of the destruction of their traditional ways of life.

History has taught us often about the outcome of this type of social control. It is an untenable solution to codify and criminalize racial status. It will only lead to dire polarization, desperation, and death. The lessons of the Jim Crow South, the South African regime, Palestine, and Nazi Germany are clear - apartheid is dehumanizing for all involved. It is not a sustainable mode of governance. It makes the owners of authority illegitimate; they are forced representatives of a captive people. We cannot control and repress the basic needs for survival. Security for a few will not be achieved through systemic suspicion and criminalization. In fact, the opposite is true. The yearning for life and freedom and dignity will not allow it. It never has. Not in Cape Town, not in Selma, not in Phoenix. It never will.

However, Arizona is a signal of greater danger coming. If Arizona’s law stands, it will have a ripple effect. Policies modeled after SB1070 will spread to many more states. These measures will take our energy and our resources away from finding true solutions to our problems, and will further polarize us. It will take us back in time and reestablish a racial line of demarcation as the basis of politics in the United States, and we will have no choice but to choose sides.

And as always, it is the young people that first and foremost exert their right to be fully human. Over the last few days we have witnessed thousands and thousands of students assembling at the state capital in Arizona. They raise their voices for freedom, justice, and dignity. Understand that this is more than a political protest. It is a cry for life and a cry for a secure and free future for all people.

We must support their energy and their insistence on solidarity with their families. They have grown up, as generations before them, witnessing the daily indignity that their families suffer. They have seen the pride of their fathers, grandmothers, brothers, and cousins broken by the crushing force of history upon them, by the weight of their birthplace and skin color. They have seen years of hard work undervalued by fear and their wealth lost to laws that protect exploiters. They have watched the concern in their mothers' eyes for their safety, for their futures, for any signs of hope, and for all signals of danger. The mothers say: *Cuidate. Please, be careful my child.*

History shows us that the overwhelming forces of hate will try to provoke these visionary youth and turn their righteous indignation into a reason to repress them.

But the spirit of freedom and justice will prevail over hate.

We must help them keep faith and restore harmony and dignity. The restoration of the sacred connection to each other and our human purpose will not come by the politics of the now. But we must act now to ensure that a different future stays in the realm of the possible.

Now is the time for moral leadership, in high places and everyday places. It begins with our President. President Obama's role in establishing the moral compass of our nation is as important as any other he occupies. The indignity that the people in Arizona now face is familiar to him, in his blood.

We look to him now, to act in sacred reciprocity. We look for him to recognize and honor the tradition of the plight and redemption of his African forebears who suffered the greatest brutality that the world has witnessed. We look to him now, to simultaneously recognize and honor the tradition of Americans who throughout history have chosen their calm and conscience over fear that was fanned to spite. He must remember those good people in Iowa who were the first to propel him to electoral victory, proving that this country can act on a sense of dignity and purpose despite all the pressures and easy access to prejudice and petty politics.

The time must come now, not a moment later. President Obama must act decisively, clearly, with resolve. As commander-in-chief he must draw the moral line, and tell politicians in Arizona that they have crossed it. He must immediately and unequivocally say no to the use of any federal resources, especially ICE forces, to enable and enforce a hate-filled and racist pogrom. He must act now, to show that there is no compromising when our human dignity is at stake.

And we must support him in doing that. In every town and city and place of worship, we should be talking to each other about Arizona. We should be organizing vigils, and speak outs, and educational forums, and acts that display our moral outrage to the crime that is being perpetrated. We should be at federal buildings and immigration offices, calling on the federal government to act **NOW**.

In these uncertain times, I find that there is an important lesson in the ancient teachings of the First Peoples of the Arizona area. Their wisdom holds that we must consider the impact of our actions not just on the present, but on seven generations into the future. It is our obligation and our legacy for our children and their children. Therefore, we should all be making a moral pledge to act in

good conscience to defy this law and stand for a much higher standard of being. We are the difference between harmony and disintegration.

On behalf of a historic and moral imperative to prevent humanity from taking a dire step backward.
Enough is Enough!

With a peaceful spirit and strong heart,

Gihan Perera

Written for the National Day Labor Organizing Network(NDLON), and the emerging youth movement in Arizona.