



**NEW YEAR WISHES AND WORK:  
PURSUING AND PRACTICING PEACE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

The end and beginning of the years always find us in a critical period of transition in which, responding to the mandates of our moral tradition and the human urgencies of our history, we are compelled to continue forward and turn our best New Year wishes into our most committed work. And we must continue to move forward without surrendering the achieved good of our past, misreading the meaning and tasks of our present or sacrificing the possibilities and promise of our future. In the tradition of the ancestors, we must engage in a reaffirming and reinforcing process and practice of remembrance, reflection and recommitment to our central mission to bring, increase and sustain good in the world and enjoy the peace and prosperity central to this. Indeed, the *Odu Ifa* says, we must “Think deeply about things, cultivate character, acquire wisdom and come forth and sacrifice so that you may have peace inside and out.”

Thus, as we reflect deeply on the awesome tasks before us during the coming year, the pursuit and practice of peace must remain a central and ongoing goal. This is so, not only because of the good of peace in and of itself, but also because real peace requires and presupposes the presence and practice of other vital goods, i.e., justice, freedom, security and well-being—personal, collective and material. Affirming this conception, the *Husia* praises an official for his Maatian, i.e., righteous behavior, saying “He has done good justice. He has made and practiced peace for the one who loves and wills it for its goodness.” Moreover, even on the battlefield, Ramesses II’s assembled soldiers counsel him to practice peace

saying, “Exceedingly good is peace and there is no blame in peace for those who practice it.”

Thus, the pursuit and practice of peace is a millennia-old moral emphasis and obligation in the sacred texts and social teachings of African people and is posed as an indispensable social goal and human good, indeed vital to the well-being of the world. For as the *Odu Ifa* says, “War ruins the world.” And whether in New Year reaffirmations and recommitments or in the daily longing and practices in the lives of everyday people, peace has always had a center place in the goods wished and worked for in the interest of our people, humanity and the world as a whole.

So, I wish a good and lasting peace for our people everywhere and for all the people of the world as well. Especially do I wish peace for the people of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan; for the people of Haiti; and for the people of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and wherever else war and waste, disease, deprivation, death and devastation are daily and persistent realities of life. And I wish for them, not the brutal peace of the home-grown or imposed tyrant or the criminal peace of the invading army and apartheid occupier, or the peace of corporate plunderers with their private armies and pilfered public funds, destroying lives and livelihoods, fields and forests as an act of progress, security or some other well-tailored and media-manipulated lie. Nor do I wish the imposed peace of the self-anointed savior, pretending humanitarian aims of saving the people from themselves, while relentlessly destroying lives, robbing them of vital resources, violating their rights and

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dignity, and structuring chaos, dependency and countless other manufactured reasons to remain or return in still more brutal forms.

On the contrary, I wish for them a peace undergirded by justice, inclusive of freedom, material and spiritual well-being, security of persons and peoples, power of peoples over their own destiny and daily lives, and conditions for ongoing human development. Here, it is important to remember Dr. Martin Luther King's distinction between a "negative peace" which strives for the mere absence of tension and a "positive peace" which requires the presence of justice. In a word, he says, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension, but it is the presence of justice and brotherhood."

King offers here an echo of ethical concern and focus put forth by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, who stated that her life's vision, work and service have been dedicated to a "paradise of peace", progress and plenty, achieved and assessed by "the great measuring rod of justice and fellowship." Both Bethune and King, who follows her along this path and pursuit of peace, insists on justice as an indispensable element in any true and real concept of peace, but they are also concerned with the quality of human relations—what King calls "brotherhood" and Bethune calls "fellowship," a sense of human relatedness and respect that leads to human solidarity and cooperation for common good.

Here it is important to understand and act on the sobering reality that peace must be practiced at home as well as abroad, in our personal, family and communal relations, as well as our societal and world

relations. And so I wish peace for every heart and home, for every family and community and for this society as a whole. For it is difficult, if not impossible, to be at peace in our homes if we fear and are oppressed through official violence, if society is hostile to us and uses its police power to profile, harass, imprison and suppress us.

And we cannot be at peace in our families if we cannot walk freely in the streets or feel secure from the intrusion of violence from outside. Likewise, we cannot feel secure in our families and homes, unless each member renounces and rejects violence as a way to relate to each other and we all hold each other accountable. Thus, to talk of peace is first and foremost to talk about the end of violence in relationships, especially violence against children, women, the disabled, elderly, and other vulnerable persons and groups of various kinds.

Ptahhotep tells us that the violence we do will return to haunt and harm us and can never yield a good and lasting end. Thus, he admonishes against use of terror and violence to steal, rob and suppress, and says to us "consider then living in peace (with others) and what they would give will come of itself." And thus, I wish for all of us to be able to say, in the words of the *Husia*, "I spent a lifetime in perfect peace". Indeed, "my heart taught me peace and guided me to excellence. For I spoke truthfully and acted justly" in and for the world and my Maatian work to bring peace and good in the world has been my essential witness and unwavering way forward.

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