

New York, 31.03.2017

## **IPB Statement**

### **A Prophetic Voice for Our Time**

#### **Honoring Martin Luther King Jr's April 4, 1967**

#### **"Beyond Vietnam, Breaking the Silence"¹**

Fifty years ago, on April 4, 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech which rings across the decades. It is among the most remarkable expressions of prophetic moral, intellectual and spiritual courage. In his speech, titled "Beyond Vietnam – Breaking the Silence," King - already the Nobel Peace Laureate - broke ranks with pragmatic critics within the U.S. Civil Rights movement who feared the political blowback of denouncing President Johnson's catastrophic war in Indochina, and named the greatest obstacles to freedom in the United States – and the West: the triple evils of racism, militarism and extreme materialism.

Five decades on, with the Trump Regime's assault on truth, its exploitation of racial and religious fears; its escalation of wars in the Middle East, bellicose rhetoric, and the Pentagon's massive build up; its assaults on the environment, and its war against truth and the U.S. constitution, the peoples of the United States and the world are increasingly at risk.

Delivered at the height of the Vietnam War and at a time when the struggle against U.S.-style racial apartheid and for racial equality had stalled, King delivered his speech to religious leaders and laity in New York's historic Riverside Church. Like the wisdom of the Prophets of old, King's words and call for a "revolution of values" are as incisive and inspiring today as they were five decades ago. With the Elders and other organizations across the United States, the International Peace Bureau urges people of conscience across the world to engage this anniversary by reading King's speech in the quiet of their homes, in public forums, or by listening to King's remarkable oration.

King understood the inter-relationship of the sources of oppression and the need for fundamental, systemic and cultural transformation if humankind is to survive in freedom. In perhaps the most ringing phrases of this speech, he taught that *"if we are to get on to the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values...the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."*

---

¹ [http://www.aavw.org/special\\_features/speeches\\_speech\\_king01.html](http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king01.html)

Anticipating his final campaign—the Poor People’s Campaign, a year later—and daring to include a critique of capitalism, King declared that *“A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.”*

His commitment to nonviolence was deep and uncompromising. With compassion and pain, he spoke of *“walk[ing] among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men” who believed that Molotov cocktails and rifles were their only path out of oppression. His answer: “social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action.”* When those tempted by violence asked *“What about Vietnam?”* King was willing to risk tacit alliance with the Johnson Administration, whose support was needed to advance the Black liberation struggle, by saying *“I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government.”*

The revolution of values, King said, *“will lay hand on the world order and say of war, “This way of settling differences is not just...This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation’s homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”*

Yet, 50 years later, the world remains aflame with war and haunted by rising military tensions between the major and regional powers. The nine nuclear weapons states are spending tens of billions of dollars to upgrade their omnicidal nuclear weapons arsenals and their delivery systems. Instead of the wars and military interventions that King denounced in Vietnam, Cambodia, Venezuela and Peru, today Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and the Congo begin the list. Nearly 200,000 people are killed annually in wars. And, largely driven by wars and compounded by racism and xenophobia, more people are suffering as refugees than at any time since the end of World War II.

Fifty years on, more than 3 billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day, with more than 1.3 billion suffering extreme poverty. With climate change, the seas are rising, and countries across the world are suffering from record-breaking storms, droughts and flooding, with countries like the United States refusing to make meaningful contributions to the Green Climate Fund established by the United Nations. And the world’s \$1.75 trillion annual global military spending is more than ten times the annual estimate (\$120 billion) to fulfill United National Millennium Development Goals.<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing the inherent equality and dignity of all people, King insisted on honoring *“allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism” that we are “called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls ‘enemy’, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers.”*

Martin Luther King, Jr. was among the most deserving recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize. And even in Trump’s America, a holiday is celebrated in his honor. King was murdered, but the Italian anti-fascist novelist Ignazio Silone taught that some people speak even more powerfully from the grave. This certainly applies to Martin Luther King, Jr.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/jan/23/whos-going-to-pay-for-mdgs>



Like the courage of the Prophets of old, the courage with which Martin Luther King, Jr. lived his life and his love and compassion for all can serve as models for every one of us. Reading, learning from, and being inspired by the words of his speech at Riverside Church this April 4, can provide each and all of us with the vision and foundation to reclaim and heal our world.

As King taught, reclaiming and healing the world and achieving a revolution of values necessitates bold, imaginative and nonviolent actions. To end and prevent wars. To honor and support the immigrants and refugees in our midst. To end racial and religious discrimination, to ensure economic and social justice. To defend and promote democracy. And to ensure human survival by abolishing nuclear weapons and restoring environmental sustainability.

*"If not us, who? If not now, when?"*