Solidarity with Black Lives Matter Movement

written by Vermont Workers Center | December 27, 2014

As human rights organizations, representing struggles ranging from disability rights to labor rights to criminal justice reform, from migrant justice to climate justice, we recognize the struggle for black liberation as central to securing all of our human rights in a country founded upon systemic racism. [2]These unjust decisions are not an aberration. Every 28 hours, a black person in this country is killed by a police officer, security guard, or vigilante. [3] On an institutional level, most profoundly in the criminal justice system, human rights are violated and families devastated by a clear disregard for black and brown lives — locking up and deporting millions, targeting and harassing communities of color, and responding with lethal brutality. This struggle is exposing a system that has dual standards — one where white people are questioned and arrested, while people of color are being killed with apparent impunity.

The national situation is mirrored here in Vermont. A black person in Burlington is 3.6 times more likely to be arrested than a white person, while the black-to-white ratio of incarcerated people in the state is 12.5 to 1 — making Vermont's incarcerated population the second most racially unbalanced in the country[4] . Black and brown people in Vermont also face racial profiling in traffic stops and systemic racism in schools [5]. While progress has been made for bias-free policing through the efforts of migrant worker-led Migrant Justice, other Human Rights Council organizations, and sympathetic legislators white supremacy still has powerful weight over this state.

We also recognize white supremacy as a tool of social control used for centuries by the ruling elite. Racism has taught poor and working-class white people to fear, blame, and target people of color instead of focusing attention on the elite who profit immensely from their exploitation and dehumanization. As an alliance of grassroots groups representing multi-racial, majority white working class communities, we, the Human Rights Council must reject divide and conquer tactics and build an anti-racist movement for human rights. We all have a stake in collective liberation for a healthy, just society grounded in love, solidarity, and dignity for all people.

Our organizations do not claim to have the answers, but we can make concrete commitments. We pledge to:

· Sign on to the national demands put forward by Ferguson Action.

· Support people of color-led efforts to fight for racial justice in Vermont by listening, learning, and taking action, such as showing up for Black Lives Matter demonstrations, or supporting bias-free policing at the statehouse and in our communities.

· Engage our membership in popular education around white supremacy and collective liberation. This means learning to lean into one another, and holding space for difficult conversations when they arise.

· Prioritize the leadership of people of color staff, members, and volunteers within our organizations, while exploring how anti-racism and collective liberation can be centered in our day-to-day organizing and shared spaces with one another.

We are honored and humbled to be fighting every day alongside communities of color in Vermont, across the country and around the world who are leading the way in organizing for the human right

to housing, healthcare, education, work with dignity, a healthy environment, and the ending of mass incarceration and police brutality. In the words of Civil Rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.”

NOTES

1] “White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.” Elizabeth Martinez, anti-racist thinker, writer, and activist. http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/What_Is_White_Supremacy_Martinez.pdf

2] While we don't mean to diminish state violence directed toward other communities of color, the #blacklivesmatter has confronted anti-black racism and the specificity and importance of black liberation. Read more: http://blacklivesmatter.com/

3] https://mxgm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Operation-Ghetto-Storm.pdf

4] http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/after-ferguson-a-consideration-of-race/Content?oid=2481031

5] http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/report-shows-racial-disparities-in-burlington-area-policing-now-what/Content?oid=2203940, http://bsdweb.bsdvt.org/Board/annualreports/Feb2013.pdf

In solidarity,
The Human Rights Council,
350Vermont
Green Mountain Self-Advocates
Migrant Justice/Justicia Migrante
Rising Tide Vermont
Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform
Vermont Center for Independent Living
Vermont Workers' Center
Vermont State Labor Council, AFL-CIO