



All Healers Mental Health Alliance Statement on Disasters: COVID-19 and Police-Sanctioned Racial Violence

June 11, 2020

The All Healers Mental Health Alliance (AHMHA) consists of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and other health professionals, community advocates and faith leaders from across the nation who have been meeting every other week since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to offer support to communities of color in times of natural and human-made disasters. We are healers culturally aligned with the communities we serve who assist those hit by disasters to tap into and build on their internal strengths and use the external systems available to them to address the injuries caused by disasters.

We are compelled by the current combined disasters of COVID-19 and the devastating murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery by the police and those who style themselves as vigilantes protecting whiteness, to call for fundamental change in policing and in the overall infrastructure of systems that should be designed to support the well-being of communities, but are not.

We call for fundamental systemic change to end the onslaught of racism on the Black community. The United States continues its centuries-old targeting of Black people for subjugation, based on the lie embedded in and essential to building what has been termed “racial capitalism,” that whites are superior and blacks inferior.

The health and well-being of Black people is undermined by the conditions in which so many of us have been forced to live – disproportionate poverty, constant disparate treatment in all areas of life, including targeting by law enforcement and the punishment system, and other constant threats to our well-being.

The system of policing upon which this country relies was created during the era of enslavement to control Black people, whether so-called free or enslaved.

We call for the abolition of this deadly system of policing and urge that it be replaced by one based on investments in life-supporting community-based infrastructures. There are models for a new way of policing being offered by a number of groups, such as Disarm the NYPD Project, the Audre Lorde Project and the Equal Justice Initiative that can serve as guides in developing a community-based and supporting infrastructure for policing.

We call on the Black community to embrace bold and radical solutions to end the 400 plus years of trauma, including physical and mental brutalization, to which Black people have been subjected. We call on the federal, state and local governments to declare racism a public health emergency that causes a range of health problems and premature deaths.

This centuries-old disaster is felt globally as seen in protests throughout the world against the murders of Black people by law enforcement and white vigilantes and the latest data on the continuing devastating spread of COVID-19 in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

We support direct action in the form of peaceful protests. Some of the protests have included the understandably human response of rioting in various cities. Most protesters are non-violent, yet all are responses to the pile-on of traumatic events that black people have suffered worldwide from the days of enslavement to the present day, including murders sanctioned by government and the disproportionately devastating effect of COVID-19.

We have contributed to the healing of communities of color, and we intend to continue by providing culturally grounded support for individual systems of healing from the assault of natural and human-made disasters. We will lend our expertise to the development and retooling of federal, state and local infrastructures such as law enforcement, health care, community development and housing, and education to unmask the root cause of the devaluing of the lives of Black people. We will work with others to re-create these systems to value all human life.