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Kathy Kelly: An MLK observance in Kabul

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Kathy Kelly sent the following today from Afghanistan

By Kathy Kelly

Kabul, Afghanistan

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Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. ... A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies. ? ?A Time to Break Silence (Beyond Vietnam)?[1] Dr. Martin Luther King, April 4, 1967

This month, from Atlanta, GA, the King Center announced its "Choose Nonviolence" campaign, a call on people to incorporate the symbolism of bell-ringing into their Martin Luther King Holiday observance, as a means of showing their commitment to Dr. King's value of nonviolence in resolving terrible issues of inequality, discrimination and poverty here at home. The call was heard in Kabul, Afghanistan.

On the same day they learned of the King Center's call, the young members of the Afghan Peace Volunteers, in a home I was sharing with them in Kabul, were grieving the fresh news of seven Afghan children and their mother, killed in the night during a U.S. aerial attack - part of a battle in the Siahgird district of the Parwan province. The outrage, grief, loss and pain felt in Siahgird were echoed, horribly, in other parts of Afghanistan during a very violent week.

My young friends, ever inspired by Dr. King's message, prepared a Dr. King Day observance as they shared bread and tea for breakfast. They talked about the futility of war and the predictable cycles of revenge that are caused every time someone is killed. Then they made a poster listing each of the killings they had learned of in the previous seven days.

They didn't have a bell, and they didn?t have the money to buy one. So Zekerullah set to work with a bucket, a spoon and a rope, and made something approximating a bell. In the APV courtyard, an enlarged vinyl poster of Dr. King covers half of one wall, opposite another poster of Gandhi and Khan Abdul Gaffir Khan, the "Muslim Gandhi" who led Pathan tribes in the nonviolent Khudai Khidmatgar colonial independence movement to resist the British Empire. Zekerullah's makeshift "bell' was suspended next to King's poster. Several dozen friends

joined the APVs as we listened to rattles rather than pealing bells. The poster listing the week's death toll was held aloft and read aloud.

They read:
"January 15, 2014: 7 children, one woman, Siahgird district of Parwan, killed by the U.S./NATO. January 15, 2014, 16 Taliban militants, killed by Afghan police, army and intelligence operatives across seven regions, Parwan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Kandahar, Zabul, Logar, and Paktiya. January 12, 2014: 1 police academy student and one academy staff member, killed by a Taliban suicide bomber in Kabul on the road to Jalalabad. Jan 9, 2014: 1 four year old boy killed in Helmand, by NATO. Jan 9, 2014: 7 people, several of them police, killed in Helmand by unknown suicide bombers. January 7, 2014: 16 militants killed by Afghan security forces in Nangarhar, Logar, Ghanzi, Pakitya, Heart and Nimroz."

We couldn't know, then, that within two days news would come, with a Taliban announcement claiming responsibility, of 21 people, 13 foreigners and eight Afghans, killed while dining in, or guarding, a Kabul restaurant. The Taliban said that the attack was in retaliation for the seven children killed in the airstrike in Parwan.

Week after bloody week, the chart of killings lengthens. And in Afghanistan, while war rages, a million children are estimated to suffer from acute malnourishment as the country faces a worsening hunger crisis.

This Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we can and should remember the dream Dr. King announced before the Lincoln Memorial, the dream he did so much to accomplish, remembering his call (as the King Center asks) for nonviolent solutions to desperate concerns of discrimination and inequality within the U.S. But we shouldn't let ourselves forget the full extent of Dr. King's vision, the urgent tasks he urgently set us to fulfill on his behalf, so many of them left unfinished nearly forty-six years after he was taken from us. One year to the day before his assassination, he said:

> ... A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, "This is not just."... The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.
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> A true revolution of values 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 peoples 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.

We must never forget the full range of Dr. King's vision, nor the full tragedy of the world he sought to heal, nor the revolutionary spirit which he saw as our only hope of achieving his vision - making do with everything we have to try to keep freedom ringing, despite the pervasiveness of the evils that beset us, and a world that needs vigorous effort to save it from addictions to tyranny and violence practiced by reckless elites.

?America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war.?

Kathy Kelly (Kathy@vcnv.org[2]) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (vcnv.org[3]) While in Kabul, she was a guest of the Afghan Peace Volunteers (ourjourneytosmile.com[4]) All quotations are taken fromDr. King?s speech given at the Riverside Church on April 4, 1967[1]

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