In Memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

—for the King family, A. Phillip Randolph, Anne and Carl Braden, Nikki Giovanni and for Mrs. Rosa and the Freedom Riders

I come to speak about the unhealthy conditions mankind faces today. Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, there has been little compassionate discussion about the innocent children who have languished under bombs of destruction, while eating from plates of emptiness and drinking from cups of helplessness. I have watched horrified as many Americans have passed unconditional love to the souls of their children, then, suffering from an ambiguous disease, have rolled collateral damage off their tongues with such unbecoming familiar ease.

Mankind is very young when compared to the love between the gravity-stricken rain and the parched earth. When viewed in this light, mankind is an infant and must be taken to the Doctor when it is obvious there is a malady that thwarts our humanity. I don't have to look far to see the symptoms of an illness that, if left untreated, will leave mankind in a marked grave with a dilapidated headstone that reads “Hatred.”

In the Appalachian Mountains people live in third-world hills. Adequate health care and education are cruel mirages that have disappeared like forgotten sunsets. The tentacles of despair are suffocating men and women from the breezy air of hope and economic betterment. In economically segregated inner cities throughout the country, embers of injustice sparked by police brutality have left cities like Los Angeles and Cincinnati engulfed in the flames of racial riots.

Of course, the people of the United States make up a small fraction of our world. The economic prosperity of the United States is not indicative of the health of Africa, East Asia and the Middle East. The illnesses those huge regional populations face indicate that mankind is approaching a spiritual and physical death on a broken bed of love surrounded by fear-driven retaliation and hatred.

In Africa, the soil is not yielding needed nourishment but shallow graves. The pandemic AIDS is burying a generation. The young and the elderly cling to one another, barely keeping their heads above a staggering sea of misery. The inferno of AIDS is steadily spreading, consuming Africa. We must begin to ask the difficult question of who will raise the orphans and who will care for the elderly?

In China, men and women long for the precious sunlight of liberty. I will never forget watching the rumbling tanks in 1989, and the political dissenter who stood in the motorized shadow of death. Our foreign policy makers have rewarded his courageous stand by trade agreements. On the fast highway of profits, our nation’s history has been disregarded like a hitchhiker in the howling winds of avarice. We have forgotten that when the United States broke the manacles of monarchy from the British throne, we did so with the help of the French.

The profanity of the Middle East is appalling. Three monotheistic religions based on love and brotherhood have dishonored their sacred prophets by taking up weapons of destruction. Their

followers indicate that ethnicities and nationalities will segregate in the afterlife. Men pray to the same spiritual entity for each other's destruction, believing their prayers just and righteous.

These illnesses that mankind faces today are symptomatic of a deeper malady that can no longer be ignored. I am deeply troubled that globally men give little thought or regard to those souls that tarry through mournful melodies of war, dressed in black at the graves of husbands and children.

If women are fortunate, they are subjected to only economic injustices. But with regularity, women find themselves shackled to a tree of inequality, stripped and raped of their inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The day has passed when women should have to prove they can think. I am convinced that women will provide the key to unlock men from the dungeons of organized violence.

At a time when silence is not a solution, some believe that now is not the time to talk about peace. Some believe that God will bless the marriage of mankind and peace through a courtship of warfare. There are some who believe that we must wait for peace, as if peace can be packaged and placed under a Christmas tree by Santa Claus. Those that believe this have forgotten that the rise and fall of the sun and moon lack even the slightest regard for the trappings of mankind. If we wait for peace much longer, we will never live in a world that is not saturated by the stench of gunpowder and the sound of crying children.

Out of the unimaginable human tragedy that began in the morning hours of September 11th, a beautiful lesson must be learned. I hope mankind will remember that we all live under the same sun, all dream under the same moon and all draw life from the same waters. When we come to the realization that the destiny of one man is eternally intertwined with that of his poor lost brother, then the strayed clouds of compassion will shower upon our world an understanding that will wash away our inhumanities.

I still possess the audacity to believe that hope will not drown in the quicksand of despair. I still believe that from a mineshaft of suffering, the guiding light from the heavens above will lead mankind to a fertile plateau of peace and harmony. I still believe that even from smoldering ashes on earth, that love will ascend to the throne of the moral universe and peace will reign.

Therefore, allow me to come to you, humbled within our guiding light, to remember the words of Edgar Allen Poe: "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, doubting dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before."

I dream of the day the pacified youth of the nation will walk out of confining rooms of conformity and complacency and into the warm sunlight of social activism.

I dream of justice tempered with love, so that men will no longer be dragged down debilitating corridors of destruction but will instead reside in the creative glow of redemption.

I dream of open-minded men who will accept the wisdom of women and begin down the path less traveled to the accommodating table of goodwill.

I dream of Afghanistan one day transformed into an everlasting oasis of freedom and love.

I dream the frayed fabrics of freedom will be sewn together by Americans and Afghans and Israelis and Palestinians.

I dream of the day when the words “nuclear annihilation” cease to cast fear in the hearts of world citizens.

I dream of a time when men empty their guns and fill their hearts and minds with the understanding that we are all brothers and sisters, displaced only by time, geography and genetics.

I still believe that men and women everywhere will watch the tired white dove of peace gracefully sail the oceans and restfully perch upon the trees of the seven continents!

These glimmering dreams will clear the overcast night of war into the soothing day of peace. Drawing on these dreams, historians will be able to pick up their pens to begin writing a lasting chapter on peace and brotherhood. Never despair; a weary sun will set on ancient hatreds. In the words of Abraham Lincoln’s most famous decree, all men and all women will finally be forever free. And on the day when the promises of the prophets become the realities of today, the broken-winged angels will sing.

So let them sing from the foothills of the Appalachians to the heavenly heights of the Himalayas. Let their melodies sound the weathered bells of the steepest Christian cathedrals and carry to the exquisite Muslim mosques and to the sacred Jewish temples. Let their music travel from the lush jungles of South America to the deserts of Afghanistan, from the Arctic to the South Pole, from the breadbasket of America to the rice paddies of East Asia and the Fertile Crescent of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Yes, let us live in peace from the daybreak of dawn to the unexplored atmosphere of eternity!

When peace is believed in, when it is heard, when it is felt, when it is written in the history books of tomorrow and lived under the darkest corner of the globe, when it is the guiding principle within the souls of Jews, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists, we will join hands and sing new meaning into the words of the African American spiritual — Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty We’re Free at Last!