

SZBA Statement and Call to Action on Systemic Racism

In deep grief over the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, the Soto Zen Buddhist Association acknowledges the deep-seated, systemic, and structural racism that poisons life in the United States of America. We vow to continue the work we are currently engaged in, and call for a fresh and coordinated effort to dismantle racism at every level of our culture, society, government, our Zen communities, and our own hearts.

Today, we see and hear the searing pain and anger of Black people, who have endured centuries of oppression in the United States and who, as a community, continue to suffer acts of violence and discrimination, including at the hands of law enforcement.

We grieve the disproportionate number of people of color who have died of the coronavirus, and see that many people of color performing essential functions of society are undervalued and oppressed economically. Those of us who are white fully avow our complicity in perpetuating this harm.

We look to the Dharma to support us as a community, and to inspire and inform our actions off the cushion. As Soto Zen Buddhist priests the Dharma is our guide as we sow the seeds of compassion and inclusion toward all people. We recognize the deeply embedded ways racism and white privilege deprive us of the world we have vowed to co-create with all beings. We vow to overcome racism in ourselves, our Sanghas, and our world.

We call on all members of the SZBA to dig deeply into our own roles in institutionalized and systemic racism and engage in many or most of the following actions:

- Center voices of color and their needs in our Zen communities. Without conscious centering, these voices and needs can get lost in our predominantly white-dominant spaces.
- Reach out to your members of color and offer emotional, spiritual, and practical support.
- Commit to 49 days of meditation, ritual, and mourning for George Floyd and for all who suffer from systemic racism and other forms of injustice.
- For these 49 days use the [SZBA's Statement of Recognition and Repentance](#) in your services. Include the statement in your monthly Full Moon Ceremony.
- Commit to amplifying the voices of Buddhists of Color, especially Black Buddhists, and their teachings.

- Speak directly about anti-racism with your Zen communities, through Dharma talks, workshops, and community discussions. Ask for feedback to make sure your message and actions strike the right note for people of color.
- Engage your community members to make actionable plans for stepping up and speaking out, honoring Right Action and Right Speech. Create community accountability for these plans.
- Listen deeply. Allow space, voice, and permission for anger and rage without judgment, guilt, or pressure to bypass these emotions.
- Reach out to Black clergy and Black social justice organizations in your community and offer your support.
- Have your communities commit to a series of brave, fierce conversations on race, privilege, and bias.
- Vow to hold ourselves, and our leaders, accountable.

Acknowledging the suffering racism causes, we commit to creating refuges for all who breathe, and for those who feel they cannot breathe. The SZBA acknowledges that we have not always been a refuge for Black and Brown people. We atone for this and we renew our vow to untangle racism's tenacious tendrils and cultivate the blossoming of a new and better world. We will practice the humility that is essential to listening deeply and that leads to real and lasting change.

With palms together,

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