

THE CALL TO CONFERENCE

By Kalamu ya Salaam/AHIDIANA (ca. 1978)

FIRST, WE ARE GLAD THAT YOU ARE HERE, your presence indicates that enthusiasm for unity runs high. Your presence indicates that the struggle is heightening. Your presence indicates a willingness to participate. Contrary to what many of the misinformed or the supercritical among us may think, the struggle is not in a state of confusion, the struggle is not near collapse, the struggle is strong, it is progressing and finally most important WE ARE WINNING! LET ME REPEAT, WE ARE WINNING!

We say this based not on unfounded optimism or because of wishful thinking but rather instead we say this because even a quick look at the ranks of our enemies indicates that there is where the real confusion is, that is where the collapse is near total, that is where the weak are to be found. We have only to read the establishment press or listen to the radio or tv. Everywhere European and American countries are suffering crisis after crisis.

On the other hand, everywhere our people are found, those of us engaged in one form of struggle or another increases daily, our successes are mounting, and the masses of our people are waking up.

So then, it is no surprise that you are here today. Let us rejoice, let us rejoice while our enemies tremble, afraid that we are uniting to fight. And our enemies tremble with just cause because we are uniting to fight and as we say all over the world PAMOJA TUTASHINDA, TOGETHERE WE WILL WIN!

Let us proceed then with uniting so that victory can come as soon as possible.

Our purpose here today is twofold. First, we are here to continue the work of unifying and organizing ourselves in order to create a better life for all of us and second, we are here to prepare for the National Afrikan¹ Women's Conference. And whereas we know that the first purpose is foremost because unity on a mass level is essential, at the same time the second purpose of preparing to participate in a national conference should not be overlooked because the best preparations that we can make are to advance our local struggles to their highest level. The best preparations that we can make would have us send delegates to the national conference who will represent those individuals who have the money and the interest to go and who actually represent only themselves.

It is clear we must struggle right here in New Orleans. We must get ourselves together right here, otherwise what can we offer a national movement?

¹ The use of "k" in Afrika is an embracement of African linguistic cultures that commonly had no hard "c" sound within their linguistic patterns. Thus, the English word "Africa" would often be problematic for speakers of traditional African languages.

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Yes, we are here to struggle. We are here to struggle and struggle we will. Throughout the remainder of this day we hope that our every action aid in our struggle. Let us take this time to say a word or two about the various workshops that will be going on. Many people have been wondering about these workshops. Each of these workshops will speak specifically to the process of advancing our struggle, of unifying, liberating and creating independence for our people.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, the first workshop, addresses itself to the need for the development of institutions within our community whose purposes are: 1. Self-Defense, i.e. protection, aid and assistance. For example, military, judicial, charitable, police and others of that type would be Self-Defense institutions. 2. Self-Determination, i.e. governing, educational and economic organizations such as political parties, schools, banks, stores, monetary systems, trade organizations, etc. And 3. The development of institutions that will promote Self-Respect, i.e. agencies that teach us to pay attention to our presence as a people, acknowledge our worth and appreciate that which we have to offer to each other and the world (which by the way is much more than many of us realize). Examples of these types of institutions would be hekalus, temples, churches, theaters, halls, social clubs, etc. Now of course we all realize that the greatest social organization is the family, the basic unit of the nation. Social organization in a nutshell will be about developing institutions that aid in the living together process. We need this.

AFRIKAN MAN/AFRIKAN WOMAN addresses the need to clarify and develop the three aspects of man/woman relationships. First, we are brother/sister i.e., we are a “house”, a house being a couple who shares common values, second, we are lovers/procreators, i.e. we are a “family” and more precisely are part and parcel of an extended Afrikan family and third, we are comrades, i.e. we are partners in the struggle, freedom fighters, liberators. Yes, we are and that’s what that workshop is about. Only to say, we are sure that each and every one of you have more to add.

The COMMUNICATIONS workshop addresses the need for the exchange of ideas and information which are relevant to our people. This workshop will address two areas. One is strategic media, i.e. media controlled by others within which we participate such as almost every tv and radio station you can name along with most newspapers and other means of communication. The other area is vital media, i.e. media controlled by our people, for example Muhammad Speaks, The Black Panther Newspaper, Unity and Struggle Newspaper, Black News, magazines like Encore, Jet, Ebony, The Black Collegian and others.

Next will be a workshop on EDUCATION. This workshop addresses the need for the development of agencies that define our needs and shapes our wants, and also institutions that transfer knowledge and skills. Again, we have the strategic and the vital. Strategic educational institutions are those controlled by others and at best they pass on knowledge and skills. Vital educational institutions however have a first job of defining our needs and shaping our wants which is important in order that we can make the best use of the knowledge and skills we gain

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wherever we may go. As we know we can and should learn from anyone or anything, we only say that in learning we do not confuse our identities with those that we learn from and that is why vital institutions are necessary; they teach us our identity, who we are or as we say, they define our needs and shape our wants.

The final workshop will be POLITICS which addresses itself to the need for the gaining of power through the development of institutions which can operate in the four areas of politics which are 1. elected and appointed officials, 2. community organizing, 3. alliances and coalitions, and 4. disruptions. Politics is a broad area, much broader than traditional bi-partisan American politics with its fake parties, depressing campaign routines and no counting voting machines.

So that's the workshops and they are only the beginning. They can only hint at the work yet to come.

Today a lot of questions will be asked. Some of them will be answered and others will not. Let us see if we can briefly answer a few of the questions right now so that we can all set off together on the work for the day.

We speak constantly of struggle; many people ask, "what is this 'struggle' about?". We feel that our ultimate struggle is for power, i.e. self-defense, self-determination and self-respect. But of course, that's not the real question. The real question today is how do we successfully move to gain power?

Some of us qualify this question of power by making a distinction between shared power and sovereign power. Shared power would be for example the setting up of a multi-racial state in which we and another people governed together and sovereign power on the other hand would be the setting up of a state that we control and in which people live under our leadership. It makes a difference, believe me it does.

However, no matter how you view power, three ingredients are necessary. The three necessary ingredients are unity, liberation and independence.

Unity is built on common cause but can be maintained only through common struggle. The three prerequisites of unity are: 1. common interest (or need), 2. common commitment, and 3. common goals. When these are present, we can realistically be about unity.

Liberation is not a state but rather it is a process, a movement from oppression and dependence to self-reliance and independence. And just like a spear has a handle and cutting edge so our struggle has both handle and cutting edge. The blade, the cutting edge will be those organizations, those political parties, those dedicated brothers and sisters who engage in the highest forms of liberating movement i.e. direct struggle with our enemies in "winner take all" battles. Usually this is armed struggle, however, whether or not it is armed struggle, it is certainly a highly political struggle and it is one that takes tremendous dedication and sacrifice. However, only a small part of the spear is made up of the blade, the majority of the spear is

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handle. And it is, by the way, the handle that makes the blade effective. The handle in this case is the organized mass of our people supporting the cutting edge, backing up the blade.

In this country at this moment, the greatest need is not for blades but for handles. We feel that handles can best be developed through united fronts. A united front is not an organization but rather an organized movement. There is a big difference.

The nature of each front will be determined by the actions of the front and influenced (not determined) by the ideologies of the organizations, groups and individuals that made up the front. The effectiveness of the front will be determined by whether or not dynamic and progressive programs come from the front. Dynamic in that there is movement from issue to issue as the situation demands and progressive in that the programs of the front help solve some of our many problems

Because many people misunderstand the nature of a united front there is often more internal conflict within a united front than there is external conflict with our common enemy. Internally within a united front there should be communication rather than conflict. Only from such a positive situation can an effective united front emerge, otherwise what we will get is a repeat of petty squabbles to win “intellectual and academic points” or to take over the front! The purpose of a united front is not to convert people to any one ideology or to act as a sorting machine or judging contest to pick out the best ideology. No, the purpose of a united front is to advance our struggle to gain power! The workings of this conference are an example of this positive approach to forming united fronts.

And finally, the third ingredient, independence, is of course the ultimate goal. The highest expression of independence is total self-reliance. And we can start now learning to be self-reliant. We can begin now to build and develop our lives through the mobilizing and maintaining of 1. skills and knowledge (which when properly organized to the maximum will yield an ideology), 2. we can strive to develop ourselves moving from the individual level, up to a group level and finally to creating viable and long lasting organizations, 3. we can constantly communicate with each other about what we are doing and what’s happening in the world, and even right here in this room, are tremendous.

We have all the necessary ingredients, it just remains for us to connect them up, to hook them together. We must move to actualize the scientific theory of synergy which states that the collected action is stronger than the individual actions all added together. And by that we mean that a group is stronger than the individual actions all added together. And by that we mean that a group is stronger than an individual and an organization stronger than a group not simply because of the numbers of people but rather also because of the level of organization and the concentration of movement. Like take a hand. A hit with each finger five times is much less effective than one powerful smash of the fist.

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So that is a brief sketch of the type of struggle we are talking about here today. And more than talking about, that is the struggle that we are moving to organize here today. And when we say we, we mean we, we mean everybody here.

That's the theory but as Nkrumah has taught us, theory without practice is empty, just as practice without thought is blind. Besides, theoretical solutions do not solve practical problems. Practical problems demand practical solutions. To talk about getting free and to get free are two different things even though we understand the necessity of theory and planning we do not overestimate its importance or think that it alone is sufficient. Besides we want to get free more than we want to talk about getting free. That is why a lot of our people – you know our people are very smart – a lot of our people want to know physically and concretely how are we going to accomplish this change we talk about so much?

And right on time, brothers and sisters, that is exactly why we are here today: to physically and concretely work to advance our struggle. We are here to bring about change, to move from good, to better, to best.

Maulana Karenga teaches us that two things are necessary for change: 1. Is there capacity which involves sufficient will and ability, and 2. is there the condition which involves necessary circumstances and situations. We feel that there is both sufficient capacity and necessary conditions to dictate change and that is why each workshop will have a project, a specific project to accomplish. A project to bring about positive and progressive change rather than have the workshops simply be an occasion to release frustrations through meaningful but non-the-less non-productive “dialogue”.

By now some of you are saying or thinking, if this is what it's all about, why call it an Afrikan Women's Conference or maybe some of us are saying to ourselves “I thought we were coming to talk about women and their roles, etc.?” But that is the point. Everything we have talked about so far requires the full participation of women. This is an African Women's Conference not because it is about women per se or exclusively but rather because it focuses on women and the participation of women in our people's struggle for power.

At present we see three distinct approaches to women's participation in our struggle. The first approach is Isolationist. This approach would have women locked up somewhere, tied down exclusively to kitchens, children and bedrooms. This is an antiquated and feudalistic approach that sees women primarily as slaves or serfs. The second approach is Separatist. The separatist approach would have special jobs for women even though they would not necessarily be tied down to the house or field. But basically, this is just a modern cut above feudalism, hence what we have as an approach to our women's participation in the struggle is just a reflection of the 20th century management/labor way of doing things. In other words, the special jobs of women are usually menial drudgery. And in most cases, this separatist approach also excludes women from the decision-making process! Isn't that true sisters? We must change this if we are to win ultimate victory. We must do better. The third and progressive

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(and at this time revolutionary) approach to women's participation in the struggle is Complimentary. This approach while acknowledging the biological differences between men and women sees no difference in political and economic participation. Brothers and sisters should be politically and economically equal! But more than that we are saying that we are complimentary which means that there can be no victory without participation of both parties. So therefore, we understand that not just brothers or not just sisters, but it will take all of us together because one without the other will not work!

The reason we are taking this time to explain this is because we did not come here to debate with each other about sex and sexism. We came here to struggle together. We are not talking about women's liberation. We are about the liberation of all our people! We are not talking about black feudalism or black run labor/management, we are talking about revolutionary change. And more important we are almost through talking about it, the deal now is to act on it.

Our focus is to advance the struggle through collective work by giving example, by showing men and women working side by side, by attacking forthright the western image of the helpless female and/or the oppressive, domineering matriarchal sapphire!

Afrikan women are neither objects nor oppressors. We must speak out in loud and affirmative tones. We can not allow each other to see Afrikan women as objects to be coldly manipulated and told where to go, what to do and what time to be back. Nor must we continue to see women as enemies, as oppressors. Our women are our comrades in struggle. Sisters work side by side with us. Side by side, the biological differences notwithstanding. We as a people will advance only as fast and as far as our women advance with us, side by side.

In closing let us say that today as this conference proceeds we will be focusing on the Afrikan woman and the problems that our sisters have today. We focus on those problems not because they are problems exclusive to women but rather because the problems of our women are in truth the problems of our people! And the problems of a people can only be solved by all the people working together. Any problem that any sister has is a problem for our society as a whole to solve. Not women alone nor men alone but our society as a whole must work to solve these problems if they are to be correctly solved.

The call today is for Afrikan women to unite. Unite first your individual selves. Step out and move forward. Unite with your sisters. Afrikan women unite! Unite with the children! Unite with the men! Afrikan women unite!

Unite to inspire. Become communal rather than competitive. In America women are taught to compete with one another for the favors of men and more recently for the favors of the system. In most cases these favors are put for the in terms of security, specifically social, economic or emotional security. Afrikan women will come about as a direct result of full participation in the struggle of our people for power which we will win, which we will win! We

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believe that to inspire is to give birth to and surely now is the time to give birth to more struggle, more victorious struggle. Afrikan women unite!

Unite to educate. Speak out on issues and offer alternatives. Analyze problems and clarify positions. And above all politicize rather than personalize, organize rather than individualize! Most of our so-called personal problems are direct or indirect results of social problems that we have in this world today. For the most part our so called personal problems cannot be solved without changing the system we live in today and in order to effectively change this system we must effectively regulate the behavior of the people who are within the system we wish to change. And in order to do that we must organize to gain political and economic power of both ourselves and our environments. Unite to educate, teach and preach on it sisters, brothers. Come on Afrikan women unite!

And finally unite to socialize. We must be socialized, come on sisters, that is, we must be taught how to live together. So simple yet so hard. You know if you look around today many of us find it difficult to live and work together, we find it difficult to love each other but Afrikan women unite, unite and socialize, help us live together, help us all to live together!

In this struggle we are all together. In this struggle we must teach each other. And we overturn ourselves, admit our weaknesses and fight against them. We are asking everyone of us to unite together; follow the example of Afrikan women uniting.

Our women have a job to do but so do we men. In fact our job as men may be more difficult because we in most cases will have to overturn not only the system and our enemies but also (and this will be much more difficult) we will have to overturn our won individual selves! We must never forget the extent of brainwashing we have been subjected to. We must never forget how much of the very same values and concepts that we have labeled as exploitative, oppressive and racist white values are actually the vey same values and concepts that not only have we been taught to cherish and practice but which are also the very same values we use every day of our lives in our day in, day out hour to hour relations with each other!

AFRIKAN WOMEN UNITE, tie together the struggle with the strength of your necessary contributions. We are very happy that you are here and have no doubt that the work that will go on today will bring about not only good feelings among us here but also it will bring about needed change for this city.

WE THANK YOU FOR COMING OUT TODAY TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS CONFERENCE, IN THIS STRUGGLE. We thank you for listening to this call to conference. If we have said anything of value it belongs to all of us, if we have made any mistakes let us move to correct them.

Thank you for your attention.

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In closing let us salute each other as comrades and get on with the work to be done. And as Imamu Baraka teaches us “The Woman’s Role, so called, in the struggle is in principle the same as the man’s, to bring ultimate victory to the people, to wage revolutionary struggle!”

BROTHERS, SISTERS, KAZI PAMOJA. WORK TOGETHER. PAMOJA TUTASHINDA.
TOGETHER WE WILL WIN! AFRIKAN WOMEN UNITE!

Asante sana, thank you very much.