



EVAWI
End Violence Against Women International

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**Start by
Believing**

One Response to Systemic Racism in America From EVAWI's Vice President

I have been pondering how to give language to the cacophony of thoughts and emotions I have felt since seeing the murder of George Floyd play out in the national media. This morning a dear friend sent me this text, "When George Floyd called for his Mother, every Black Mother in America heard him and it collectively broke their hearts."



In recent years, I have been known to say, over and over, that it is exhausting being Black in America. The collective fear of hearing about the deaths of unarmed Black people at the hands of law enforcement and vigilantes adds to our shared sense of emotional and physical trauma. Black people in America experienced a collective visceral response, "Not again," upon hearing about the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Botham Jean, Philando Castille, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and Trayvon Martin, to name only a few. Are you exhausted?

Like others, I have been haunted by the look of those cold vacant eyes from a man who could so callously kill an unarmed subdued man in broad daylight, in full view of witnesses. I found it equally distressing that he was a sworn police officer. Not even the presence of eyewitnesses or video recordings could check the unspoken camaraderie that gave license to this brutality. This naked, unbridled hate is unfathomable.

As a career crime victim advocate, one of the first things I learned was to believe and support victims. EVAWI has championed this concept through our Start by Believing campaign. Perhaps we should apply this same rationale as we work to dismantle systemic racism and institutional oppression. I wish someone would have believed us long before now and valued our lives. Persons in our field are authentic leaders, and that is evidenced by how far the field has come in a relatively short time. And as we

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move forward in our work to address gender-based violence, please recognize that it cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. It cannot be accomplished without anti-oppression work.

It took the unselfish act of a mother, Ms. Mamie Till, to show the disfigured and mutilated body of her 14-year old son to the world. Emmitt was lynched in Mississippi for “offending” a white woman. Ms. Till said, “When people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before.” It is indeed my prayer that now, after seeing what happened to George Floyd, people who never stood up before will take a stand.

If you desire to be an ally, you might ask, “What can I do?” What is needed now from you is to do your work. Begin by becoming educated. Read. Listen. Renounce revisionist history. Do not react defensively. I believe, and validate our experiences, and know that empty platitudes are not enough. So when you hear the phrase, “Black Lives Matter,” please don’t retort, “All lives matter.” When you do this you are negating our experience.

In the immortal words of the civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, Black people in America are “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” I want to see the kind of changes that will prove Black lives matter, so it is not just a slogan, because I am truly sick and tired of being sick and tired.



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In Solidarity and Support, EVAWI Board, Staff and Associates.