



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Westchester Chapter

A Letter From President Edwards

To All Members, Partners, and Friends of UNA-USA Westchester Chapter,

I wanted to begin my letter as I begin many letters, with the phrase, “I hope this finds you well.” But, over the past couple of months, how we define “well” has been changed for many of us. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call on so many levels. That, fueled further by the horrific inequities and lack of civil justice that surround the death of George Floyd and others, are forcing us to think long and hard about what really matters...about what should be the priorities in our lives—in our world...what we believe, and what we are willing to support and uphold.

The basic answers should be simple. For me, **Justice** matters. **Decency** matters. **Fairness** matters. **Peace** matters.

Unfortunately, we can never have the last one—peace—without ensuring the others. I know it’s hard to believe in 2020 that this should even have to be a conversation—but it does. A critically important conversation, and one which we all—every single one of us—need to advance...*for our kids, for ourselves, for each other.*

We have been fortunate to have various statements issued from our UNA-USA national office and other UN entities about the events that have been all over the media, of late. Very vocal commitments to support and advocate for change in what is a terribly broken system. But, this is personal for me. I served as a medic, and was wounded for, this great country during the Vietnam War. I have seen first-hand the spoils and devastation when societies are not peaceful, and when leaders are not just, and I hope and pray that I never have to live this again. The good news is that this is in **our** hands. **We** can choose the path to peace. We **can** build that road...with our voices, and with our resolve, and with our constructively channeled passion.

And we **are**.

Peaceful protests all across the country, including our own Westchester County, are proving perhaps more loudly than ever that we—**as one human family**—want peace, and fairness, and decency. As a chapter of the United Nations Association, it is critical to consider our role in the broader fabric of the global community. However, it is also important to view that role through a local lens. This past week, numerous elected officials, grassroots advocates, and Westchester County residents joined the millions of people worldwide rallying for justice, for peace. The Mayor of New Rochelle, Noam Bramson, convened interfaith community leaders on the steps of City Hall. They collectively heralded some of the most important messages of our time. The video can be seen [here](#), and the Mayor’s remarks are [here](#) in their entirety. I extracted a section from his remarks below, which I think are particularly resonant:

*“Let us channel our energies into lifting each other up, instead of tearing each other down. Let us...set an example of a better way. Especially at this moment, when in so many cities across America, rage is spilling over into violence. In some sense, this can be understood....And yet we must be clear in saying that justice and peace run together. To meet violence with violence dishonors the core tenets of the civil rights movement, and visits destruction on the very people and neighborhoods that have already suffered too much. It is wrong. And it is fruitless. Be sure that every violent act plays right into the hands of those who would deny our common humanity, because it lets them change the subject – from justice to order. To be angry and loving at the same time, **that is strength, that is power.**”*

The ability to engage people and guide their thoughts is powerful, indeed. **That’s precisely what we—all of us—are doing.** We are making clear our expectations of our elected officials, our community leaders, our police and military, and of ourselves. And we are not the only generation to do this. The generation of Ghandi has done this, the generation of Dr. King has done this, and the very founders of our country have done this, described in the Declaration of Independence:

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all [people] are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain **unalienable rights**, that among these are **life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness**. — That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among [the people], **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed**, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is **the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government**, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to **effect their safety and happiness**.*

Yes, we want that **just society**. We want that **peaceful society**. And we are **not alone**.

I am hopeful that we can and will use our collective voices to advocate for change in this country, as an example of leadership for others in the world. Change that respects, protects, and fulfills **all human rights** outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; change that secures commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); change that erases the notion that **Black Lives Matter** diminishes an unconditional veracity that All Lives Matter; change that holds our leaders accountable for civil and environmental justice; and change that, in its simplest form, applies the “golden rule” to **treat others as you would like to be treated**.

Peace to all, and stay safe.



J. Yuhanna Edwards
President
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[Website](#)