



Letter from Survivor Alliance Executive Director Re: Survivor Alliance Commitment to #BlackLivesMatter

5 June 2020

Dear Survivor Alliance allies and friends,

It goes without saying that I write to you in turbulent times. There is so much to say that it has been hard for me to know where to start. I decided to take my own advice to others, and start exactly where I am - in that place of not knowing. I hope you will read to the end.

I have no idea where to even begin with everything that is happening in the world. Thinking about the impact of COVID19, Cyclone Amphan, and rising facism on survivor communities has already been overwhelming. The extremity of violence that our communities suffer every day is the reason why Survivor Alliance exists. I spend a lot of time proactively compartmentalizing all the hurt, pain and injustice in the world, because if I thought about it all the time, I would, as I think any of us would, always be an emotional and psychological wreck. I imagine that this is the same for all or most of you.

Please make no mistake: Survivor Alliance is committed to the Black Lives Matter movement and opposes all police brutality.

We *must* be committed to Black Lives Matter, because the legacy of British Colonialism and the capture and enslavement of African people by the United States is ever present. The legacy of intergenerational trauma of enslavement is ripe and felt today. Many survivors of human trafficking have shared that their black communities experience high rates exploitation and human trafficking. In the United States, black Americans are incarcerated at overwhelmingly greater rates than white Americans. This is the direct legacy of legal slavery.

Yes, there is slavery in every country, and I spend a lot of time reminding people about this. However, the “Global North” countries have been key players in worldwide imperialism. International Development Aid that goes from rich and predominantly white countries to poorer and often black and brown countries, still comes with a paternalism and savior mentality. This does not allow countries to design their own freedom and futures, and directly creates the systemic, not individual, vulnerabilities that lead to human trafficking. The unfettered capitalism and its consequences (e.g. underfunded social services) is also a key contributor to slavery and human trafficking.

Survivor Alliance takes an intersectional lens to oppression. We believe that ending all forms of oppression is key to ending slavery and human trafficking. We make sure to lend our voices in support of other movements to end injustice, and to learn with and from them. In Survivor Alliance’s organisational plan, we have committed to proactively building coalitions with other social justice movements. As the ED, I have done this by continually building

relationships with people in a variety of movements. Movements fighting violence against women, for climate justice, justice for the Windrush Generation, for the LGBTI+ community, indigenous and immigrants' rights, rights of undocumented people, workers' rights, disability rights, and so much more.

We promote this intersectional lens in our staff team and with our members through our core values of empathy and learning. We hope that we communicate this anti-oppression lens through our actions and behaviors everyday with each and every one of you. And to be clear, our anti-oppression and intersectional lens is drawn from the work of Black feminists and indigenous peoples.

I want to lay out some actions that Survivor Alliance will take on board from this day forward, or that you can be sure to hold us accountable for.

- 1. We will update our Membership Manifesto** - We need to make our anti-oppression lens more clear to others. We will continue to welcome members of any background and walk of life.
- 2. We will review our Ground Rules for events** - We typically make it clear in writing or verbally that we have no tolerance for racism or discrimination of any kind. We will review all Ground Rules published for all our programs and events and ensure that we can say with confidence that this does happen every time.
- 3. We will continually train and educate our staff and members** - Every month, our staff reflects on Survivor Alliance Values. We will add an additional topic for reflection that focuses on some area of oppression that needs to be explored and will discuss how these issues intersect. Proactive anti-racism work will be a key part of this reflection. For our members, we will enhance our training curriculum on intersectional anti-oppression work.
- 4. We will practice with our members and allies the skills of having uncomfortable conversations with ourselves and each other.** It is clear that our society needs people who can face discomfort within themselves and recognise their own biases. This is a difficult skill but must be nurtured. We also must become more skilled at listening and speaking about racism. This means being aware of your own privilege, knowing when to leave space for others, speaking authentically, and not centering yourself if you are not a part of the harmed group.
- 5. We will support systems, groups, and people that are working to dismantle white supremacy.** We will shine a light on these organisations and recommend resources for anti-racist education.
- 6. We will respectfully challenge our allies and members when racism shows up in anti-slavery and anti-trafficking work.** We do this in an effort to protect our members, staff, and allies against racism outside the organisation and to relieve black people from the burden of educating people about racism.

7. **We will listen to any concerns about racism within Survivor Alliance and take them seriously.** We do not profess to be free of racism. We will be mindful that “making it” as an organization can pressure us to take on practices that are valued by dominant society, but that contain racist elements or roots.
8. **We will hold space for our black members, staff, and allies.** We will not define what this space should look like and will respond as best as we can to your needs. When racism comes up in an event, we will challenge it, check-in with you, and do what is in our power to address it.

It is hard to know how to end a letter like this, but it seems most appropriate to me to honor the lives of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and the countless other black lives taken.

To honor Iyanna Dior, Dana Martin, and the violence against black trans lives.

We also honor the lives of black folks in Britain and anywhere else who are disproportionately harmed and murdered by police violence.

We are grieving with each of you and your communities.

To our black allies, we stand with you.

To allies who question the content or sending of this email, reach out to me directly.

To our white or white passing allies who take this as a direct attack. It is not. Please reach out to me.

To allies who wish that we would make a statement about any other injustice, I hear you. This is a profound moment in our world’s history. Let us hope this is the beginning of a new Civil Rights Movement. And like that movement, it was never about one person’s rights being more important than anyone else’s. This is about all of us.

Black Lives Matter is about all of us.

Yours in grief, anger, and a steadfast solidarity,



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