



The University of Vermont

Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources

My Dear University of Vermont and Rubenstein School Community,

I am reaching out and speaking out to remember and honor George Floyd, today, on the day of his burial, while also remembering the many other Blacks and African Americans who have lost their lives via police brutality, racial injustices and racialized institutional practices. I firmly and confidently affirm both my personal commitment and the Rubenstein School's commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement. We at UVM are all called to action. As a white woman, and the leader of the Rubenstein School, I implore each of us to commit to rectifying the injustices in our society to create an equitable world.

We are devastated by the police brutality and racial violence in our country. We say the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and we sadly understand that these victims are not anomalies. They are the result of multiple generations of systemic racism. We must also call out the ongoing failure of our nation's response to COVID-19 which has disproportionately impacted communities of color. Again, this is the result of systemic racism. We stand in solidarity, kneel in protest, and march onward with communities calling for justice and equity.

Several months ago, the faculty, staff and students in the Rubenstein School refined our strategic vision and committed to building a just, equitable, and sustainable world together. We must rectify the injustices in our society to create an equitable world, one in which a person's identities do not dictate their access to opportunities or the value of their life. We must do this work first if we are to also realize a sustainable world. This is not simply a critique of the world we are observing outside of the Rubenstein School. Within our own community, we must take full ownership and responsibility for our own shortcomings.

We are each struggling to find the next steps and the right words. It has also been a challenge to communicate well without taking risks and making mistakes. However, the path toward healing and justice begins with a risk to step out into our own uncertainty and especially, to listen and to amplify the voices of those who have been silenced. There will be discomfort and difficult conversations ahead. We must embrace this because staying silent is even more frightening. Staying silent is being complicit in perpetuating a broken system. Let us continue to educate ourselves and each other so we can work together to dismantle structures of oppression.

We must do this work NOW if we are to realize an ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable world. Individually and collectively we must commit to deconstructing racial injustices and institutionalized racism. AND, individually and collectively, we must agree to work together. I want our black and brown communities to know that they are not alone in remembering, reflecting and grieving. We grieve together. We simply cannot remain silent or unengaged in the conversation.

I gratefully invite your comments, reflections, suggestions and requests at rsenr@uvm.edu. We commit to listening and acting.

In solidarity, compassion and with humility,

Nancy Mathews, Dean
and the Rubenstein School Senior Leadership Team