

Statement from Assata Shakur aka JoAnne Chesimard

Written by Assata Shakur ID4250
Sunday, 30 March 2008 22:29 -

First of all, let me say thank you, to the many people who have helped me to celebrate my 60th birthday. Thank you for your beautiful birthday cards and for your warm and eloquent messages. Thank you for your activism, your radiant energy and most of all for your love. I am sincerely grateful for your support and for your commitment to social justice, truth and freedom.

It is somehow surprising for me to realize that I have lived on this planet for 60 years. I never imagined that I would live this long. Some of those years were very hard years, other years were happier, but I have never forgotten who I am or where I came from. For as long as I can remember, I was acutely aware of my oppression and of the oppression of my people.

In some ways it was easier for my generation. Racism was blatant and obvious. The "Whites Only" signs let us know clearly, what we were up against. Not much has changed, but the system of lies and tricknology is much more sophisticated. Today young people have to be highly informed and acutely analytical, or they will be swept up into a whirlpool of lies and deception.

Freedom, justice and liberty are words that are thrown around a lot in the United States, but for most of us, it is empty rhetoric. With each and every passing day the country becomes more repressive, the police more viciously aggressive and the so-called constitutional guarantees obliterated by scare tactics. The so-called 'Conservatives' are only interested in conserving their privileges and power and helping their rich friends to become richer. Black 'Conservatives' serve their "masters" and are basically interested in grinning, shuffling and 'Uncle Tomming' all the way to the bank. This is the most corrupt administration that has ever existed. They have blatantly stolen not millions, but billions of dollars. They are actively seeking to preserve the old colonial order with a new face, where the oppressed people of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East are expected to suffer happily, and sing praises to imperialism to the tune of the star spangled banner.

It is extreme arrogance to attack and occupy a country and expect its people to rejoice and lick your feet. Not even Roman Emperors were involved in such misguided conceit. The U.S. government has no right whatsoever, to force its undemocratic "democracy" on the rest of the world. I am 60 years old and I cannot remember a time when my people ever experienced true democracy. It is still the active policy of the U.S. government to use a wide variety of tactics to prevent poor people and people of color from voting. And when we do get to vote, our votes usually do not count. For the most part, there are no decent candidates to vote for, because the U.S. government is a "dollarocracy" where candidates have to beg and pander to the corporate

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rich in order to be elected.

I am 60 years old, and I have never in my life seen such widespread violence and cruelty. The U.S. government has more people in prison than any other country in the world, and it is now actively involved in creating prisons all over the world. Abu Gharib is only the tip of the iceberg. People all over the world are being imprisoned in secret prisons, with no formal charges being made against them. They are imprisoned under the most inhumane conditions, and detained for indeterminate periods of time, with no rights, no trials, and no justice whatsoever. In short, the leaders of this country are war criminals. All the U.S. government has to do is call them terrorists or extremists, enemy combatants or whatever and they can do anything they want to these people. I live in Cuba, and the Cuban people watch horrified, as the U.S. Army illegally occupies their land in Guantanamo and commits unspeakable acts of torture on their soil, in the name of "freedom." The U.S. government not only destroys the lives of people around the world, many mothers have cried because many of our young people have had their lives destroyed as well. I believe that this earth was meant for tenderness and not terror. The imperialist countries not only implement terrorist policies in the Third World, their actions also provoke terrorist activities and internal disputes between people. I believe that when Western governments learn to respect the sovereignty of Third world governments, and to offer solidarity and support rather than imperialist policies and exploitation, most of the world's problems will be close to being solved.

Inside the belly of the beast, conditions are also disastrous. Most of the victims of Katrina are still waiting for decent housing and public services. Schools and hospitals around the country are either deteriorating or closing down. Around the country social programs to help poor and working people are mostly a thing of the past. Our young people are being marginalized, criminalized and brutalized. It is often an act of courage to go to school, or simply drive down the street. The U.S. government's occupation of Afghanistan has produced a record increase of heroin production, and the "war on drugs" continues to be a war on poor people and people of color. The police brutality in our communities is not a simple matter of randomly "bad" cops. This government is more repressive than ever and more and more of a police state. When you have a trigger happy president, a trigger happy vice-president, a trigger happy office of homeland security, you are bound to have an increase of trigger happy police and many of our young people are bound to end up dead or imprisoned. The social policies of the United States have deteriorated from so-called benign neglect to malignant hostility or indifference.

The role the press and the media have played in all this has been increasingly malignant. There is no such thing as a free press in the United States. Journalists receive big salaries for telling "official" lies. The media both knowingly and naively became the vehicle for misinforming the people of the United States and convincing the people that it was "necessary" to go to war. Their "reporting" was based on outright lies. Now they "embedded" in the military, continuing to

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misinform the people, and distort the truth.

I am 60 years old and I am proud to be one of those people who stood up against the ruthless, evil, imperialist policies of the U.S. government. In my lifetime I have opposed the war against the Vietnamese people, the illegal contras – war in Nicaragua, the illegal coup in Chile, the invasion of Haiti and of Grenada, and every other illegal, immoral and genocidal war the U.S. government has ever waged. I have never been a criminal and I never will be one. I am 60 years old and in spite of government repression, in spite of the media's lies and distortions, in spite of the U.S. government's COINTELPRO Program to criminalize and demonize political opponents, I feel proud to count myself as someone who believes in peace and believes in freedom. I am proud to have been a member of the Black Panther Party although the U.S. government continues try to distort history and continues to persecute ex-members of the Black Panther Party. Just recently, the U.S. government has indicted and arrested 8 ex-Black Panthers in a case that was dismissed 30 years ago. The case was dismissed some 30 years ago when it became obvious that the most vicious forms of extreme torture were used to extract false confessions from some of the so-called defendants.

I am 60 years and it is doubtful that I will ever live to see my people free of oppression and repression. But I am totally convinced that our collective dream of freedom will some day be realized. I sincerely implore young people to develop their minds, to develop their skills, to expand their states of consciousness, and sharpen their abilities to analyze reality. Those Africans who conspired with the European slave trade to sell us into slavery were seduced by trinkets. I hope and pray that our young people will not continue to fall into the same traps. I have always loved my people and always loved our culture. The culture of my people has always been rich and always been filled with the seeds of resistance. I hope that young people hold fast to that tradition. I sincerely hope that all young people will have the courage and the wisdom to hold on tight to their humanity and their historical mission. Most people in the Americas, were either indigenous people whose ancestors were victims of genocide, or brought to this hemisphere as slaves, or came to this continent seeking freedom. I believe that it is our collective duty to make freedom a reality. I truly believe that it is possible to end oppression and repression on this planet. If we all see ourselves as citizens of this planet, and citizens of the world, it will be easier for us to save this planet and recognize the human rights of human beings around the world.

Much love, Much Solidarity,

May we all make freedom a reality,

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Assata Shakur

Learn more of Assata Shakur, aka JoAnne Chesimard at <http://www.assatashakur.org>

*In 'The Eyes of the Rainbow', a documentary film with Assata Shakur by filmmaker Gloria Rolando we are given an 'inside' look at the woman Assata Shakur and we can hear her amazing story and see and understand what life in Cuba has been like for her.

To view 'The Eyes of the Rainbow' - a documentary film with Assata Shakur by filmmaker Gloria Rolando please click [HERE](#) .