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IAEM-USA Diversity Committee Issues Open Letter to Emergency Managers June 12, 2020

Emergency Managers:

Over the last couple of weeks, we've witnessed an outpouring of support worldwide from diverse populations standing up to racial injustice and privilege. Several companies, organizations and agencies have sent out correspondence supporting the cause that Black Lives Matter and speaking out against the horrible images of the death of George Floyd. Some were better than others, some had good intentions, while some addressed the countless others who lost their lives at the hands of others.

Hopefully, each of us has taken some time to reflect about the recent events and how they impact us as individuals, impact our co-workers in the agencies where we work, the communities we live in and our profession as emergency managers. This may have caused some of you to initiate or engage in conversations to understand this isn't a new movement – that it's not rooted in the events that have occurred over the last few weeks in Georgia, Kentucky and other places that haven't made the news.

Let us not forget that all of this is occurring amid a public health crisis that has claimed thousands of lives – one whose rate of infections and deaths, continues to disproportionately impact black and brown communities across the country. Sadly, this has led to discriminatory practices and actions against our Asian American neighbors and communities.

As emergency managers, some of us had to activate our emergency operations centers to respond to local events, but most likely not addressing how the activities in our communities may be impacting those we work shoulder to shoulder with every day. We have a job to do – to respond to our communities' needs and, in some cases, to help restore and recover – but we cannot do this effectively if we don't understand the communities or populations we serve.

So, as we read the numerous letters, tweets, stories and articles about how tragic the footage was and now is the time for change, there isn't a lot being said on what changes we can make.

As individuals we must address our own beliefs, feelings, assumptions and biases in a way that's open and honest to ourselves. But as emergency managers, the time has come to move this from a conversation to action – we **MUST** take steps towards racial and social equity:

- **First – acknowledge the data.** Disasters have, will continue to and do disproportionately impact minorities and ethnic groups

- **Emergency Managers; ask yourself....**
 - Has your staff addressed implicit bias and cultural competency in your required training?
 - Has your office or jurisdiction ensured digital access and literacy for all residents?
 - Do your office demographics match the communities you serve? If not, what are you doing about it?
 - Do the languages and methods you utilize to communicate align themselves with the needs and demographics of your communities?
 - Have you partnered with community partners and affinity groups to amplify your messages to the community to reassure those who don't trust government?
 - Have you established a volunteer, student worker or internship program to promote the profession while offering opportunities to those who are not represented or who are underserved in your communities?

- **When engaging the community**
 - Are your outreach efforts targeting the community equally?
 - Do your programs and efforts address social and racial equity?
 - Do your programs address access and functional needs?
 - Are you addressing the needs of your community or are you just “checking a box?”
 - Do your plans, training, exercises, and all other programs ensure inclusivity and equity?
 - Have you identified or established community partners in advance in your underserved and marginalized communities, to better address their social, economic and cultural needs when responding to a disaster?
 - Do you have a method or process to connect underserved or marginalized communities to disaster relief and community support services?

Some of you may agree these are steps that should have been addressed long ago, but not everyone has met this benchmark. What you have read so far, should serve as a reminder to emergency managers of how diversity impacts our day-to-day lives.

As we try to professionalize emergency management into more than just a second career, we need to also address the diversity in our hiring processes. If our association and profession is to grow, we need to increase our ranks with women of color, provide opportunities to those coming out of college and make sure everyone has an opportunity no matter their age, race, gender, religion, orientation or education level.

Government will struggle to do enough in advance to address the overwhelming number of needless deaths in our communities. We can, though, do better on how we empathize, respond and communicate with our communities that are hurting or in pain – to console and understand their outrage and right to protest.

We need to identify and build trust with key figures to lend their voices and partnerships in advance. Meaningful partnerships can assist when faced with responding to the destruction of our communities from the next virus, disaster, environmental catastrophe, social justice issue or death from the hands of another.

Lastly, the Diversity Committee cannot sit silent and still to this injustice, prejudice or discrimination if it's going to push for diversity, equality, equity, fairness and inclusion within IAEM. We must respect each other and our different perspectives, opinions and backgrounds. Inclusion allows us to learn and grow together, be open to other ideas and identify even the slightest examples of hate, racism and intolerance. The committee is a resource here to support and assist you when you face these challenges.

Remember you are not alone – we are in this together. #IAEMstrong

IAEM Diversity Committee

IAEM is a nonprofit professional organization representing more than 5,000 emergency management and homeland security professionals for local communities, state and federal disaster officials, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and others involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from all types of disasters, including acts of terrorism. It is dedicated to promoting the "Principles of Emergency Management." IAEM provides access to the largest network of emergency management experts who can provide advice and assistance; the Certified Emergency Manager/Associate Emergency Manager program; annual scholarships; a comprehensive monthly newsletter; and more.

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