“Our journey to heal the lingering wounds of slavery began five years ago when the trustees of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation took a hard look at our own mission.”

—Dr. Gail Christopher, vice president – program strategy, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

A Journey of Healing

These challenges are found throughout the world and one private foundation can only do so much. Global leaders and the institutions they represent have an obligation to create opportunities for the kind of public discourse that acknowledges past injustices visited upon communities due to beliefs in racial hierarchy and its constructs of privilege, rights and entitlement. This dialogue also must present pathways to addressing inequitable outcomes for these communities. Civic, business and faith-based leaders must play their part, too, and use their considerable influence to heal racial division and build more equitable opportunities.

This call for dialogue toward action is made all the more pressing by the seemingly unending stream of news of racial, inter-ethnic and religious divisions. Within the last year, reports of mass killings of teens, the murder of innocent school children, along with escalating racial tensions and violence in many nations stand as stark reminders of the danger that looms when extremist, xenophobic, hateful and racially driven beliefs are allowed to fester.

The untimely and violent deaths of too many young people in the United States have sparked protests in cities across the country, yet this story is repeated—yet untold—in communities across America and indeed, the world. Thousands of young people are killed each year, sift to senseless violence. The cycle of hate repeats itself over and over again yet the proverbial needle has not moved. Progress must be made, and we must hold ourselves accountable for that progress.

To move forward, it is important for our leaders to understand the ubiquitous nature of racism and its historical lineage across all nations. The devastating effects of slavery, colonialism and resource-driven conflict have been well-documented, yet we have not done enough to challenge the ideology of racial hierarchy that supported and sustained these ills. To this day, we still see a world where the nations that benefited the most from the slave trade and colonial ambition remain the most economically and technologically developed. These countries, paradoxically, are often the most reluctant to confront or discuss their role in these types of tragedies with calls for tolerance and temporary efforts to restore peace and civility.

But history tells us that episodic efforts are not adequate. The insidious nature of engrained hateful beliefs requires sustained and coordinated work for their eradication. Leaders must prioritize this vital work as part of broader efforts to promote development and economic progress within and between countries.

But to truly succeed in the long-term, there must be a solemn commitment by one and all to this work, to uniting our planet, to rejecting racism, to finding strength not resentment in our differences. Our children and their collective futures are at stake.

The world cannot wait until some dream of better opportunity—this work, the work of racial healing, must start today. We call on our global leaders gathered here to demonstrate the courage and commitment to build a more equitable and just world for these children, across communities, across cultures and across nations.