IN 1978, THICH NHAT HANH WROTE THE POEM “PLEASE CALL ME BY MY TRUE NAMES.”

THIS IS OUR 2022 UPDATE.

The National Council of Elders
I am the 10-year-old girl crouching in terror in an Uvalde Texas classroom as I call 911 whispering for help

And I am the 18-year-old young man who invades her classroom and murders her with her teachers and classmates

I am the gun manufacturer who sells the semiautomatic assault rifle to the 18-year-old for $1870.

I am the well-paid NRA lobbyist working to ensure that the manufacturer will be able to continue selling such guns to 18-year-olds

I am the senator that happily takes the lobbyist’s money for continuing to obstruct any laws regulating guns.

I am the armed school policeman standing outside the classroom afraid to stop the young man because I know just how deadly he can be with that insanely powerful weapon.
I am the 10-year-old girl sheltering in a theater in Mariupol Ukraine

And I am the Russian general that orders the missile strike on the theater that kills the girl and dozens more

I am the American arms dealer that knows that my profits will increase with every atrocity perpetrated in Ukraine

I am the congressperson who year after year votes more than half our federal budget be spent on instruments of war, from drones and bombs to the nuclear war machine.
I am the grandmother in Detroit at rest in her porch swing keeping eyes on alert as part of a Neighborhood Watch team

I am the high school teacher in Oakland teaching young people they can be strong by learning the skills to talk out their conflicts

I am the out-of-work cook in Texas mailing $3 to support a progressive congresswoman who speaks common sense about gun safety laws

I am mother of three in Chicago arranging days off and childcare so I can march with the Poor People’s Campaign for a moral awakening

I am the Beloved Community Center in North Carolina launching a statewide Truth, Justice & Reconciliation campaign
I am the peace activist who knows we must stop the bullies.
Without ourselves resorting to the bully’s bullets and bombs.

And I am the organizer who knows we can do this, if we work together, if we see how our struggles connect, if we commit to adding yet one more action for justice & peace to all the work we already do.

I am the elder who has lived long enough to know we have done it before, and with our hearts filled with love and our minds fixed on growing a culture of peace we can do it again...perhaps even better.
With this poem, the National Council of Elders encourages each of us to continue paying attention, acknowledge the interconnections in the challenges we face, stay strong in active hope, and commit to doing that one additional action that responds to this moment in our ever-changing moments.

We would name this moment one of national horror at the violence & carnage in Buffalo, in Uvalde, and in Ukraine where our country is risking nuclear war rather than working for peace. We know this moment is built on a history of violence used to exert dominance in this country from Jamestown to Wounded Knee, from Birmingham to our border with Mexico, and in the world from Vietnam to Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Palestine. But we also know it doesn’t have to be that way. Together, we can choose to create that culture of peace.

With us, what commitment to working for justice & peace will you make?
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ELDERS

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