



## **STATEMENT BY DR. GAIL C. CHRISTOPHER, NCHE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ON THE NATIONAL DAY OF RACIAL HEALING**

### **President Jimmy Carter Epitomized the Meaning of Healing and Transformation**

WASHINGTON, DC – Nine years ago, the National Day of Racial Healing (NDORH) was launched as an annual observance dedicated to promoting equitable communities and fostering truth-telling, understanding, and collaboration to envision and create a future in which racism – the belief in a false hierarchy of human value, no longer defines our society. This transformative day allows communities, organizations, and individuals to engage in discussions and actions that pave the way for healing and transformation. It inspires people to build stronger relationships across different racial and cultural backgrounds, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and just society. We want to reflect on the shared humanity that unites us all and work towards dismantling systemic inequalities.

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to participate in activities promoting racial healing, such as community conversations, film screenings, art exhibits, workshops, and more. The day creates spaces for us to acknowledge our biases and privilege, educate ourselves on the impacts of racism, and plan actions to create a more inclusive world. It's through our collective engagement that we can truly make a difference.

Today, I think about a man who embodied the meaning of NDORH. During his lifetime, former President Jimmy Carter transformed from the grandson of a Deep South plantation owner, overcoming his interpersonal prejudice and bias, to champion human rights, civil rights, and diversity. Carter's father was a segregationist who employed Black families as tenant farmers. Yet, Carter was a living example of the tenets of racial healing and the NDORH. He acted within these principles throughout his entire life's work. The degree to which he worked for peace, bridging divides, and respecting human dignity was extraordinary.

Carter had compassion for people suffering and for those exposed to injustices. In sharp contrast to what we experience today, he was a political leader who valued honesty. He believed in the responsibility of telling the truth. He embraced humility. You don't get to be President of the United States, the most powerful elected person in the world, without a huge ego. Still, he embodied humility; it was front and center. His spiritual values kept him humble and honest. And he was able to forgive. He was a real peacemaker. After his presidency, he didn't just build a library; he actively worked to support human rights and fairness worldwide. His actions underscored his love of humanity.

His life's work was dedicated to transformational policies and practices. Carter facilitated the Camp David Accords, the 1978 agreements marking a significant step toward peace in the Middle East at the time. He rejected violent options and negotiated the release of US hostages in

Iran, calling them “52 precious lives.” A strong advocate for a Palestinian homeland, Carter wrote a controversial book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, arguing that Israel's continued control and construction of settlements were significant obstacles to peace in the Middle East. He created the Energy Department to help everyday Americans by promoting energy conservation, developing alternative energy sources, and ensuring the country's energy security. He renegotiated the Panama Canal Treaty to improve relations with Latin American countries, address tensions surrounding U.S. control of the canal, and recognize Panama's sovereignty while ensuring the canal remained open to international shipping. Carter installed solar panels on the White House (later removed by President Reagan), promoting energy conservation.

After his presidency, through the Carter Center, he continued improving the quality of life for humankind. His Center advanced human rights, resolved conflicts, and prevented diseases. One of its crowning achievements was leading the near eradication of Guinea worm disease, a parasitic ailment that once afflicted millions. The Center is also renowned for its work in observing elections across the globe to ensure fair and democratic processes, as well as initiatives aimed at improving mental health awareness and reducing stigma. Carter’s engagement with Habitat for Humanity also aimed to create affordable housing for families across the country.

Jimmy Carter inherited the legacy of racial hierarchy about as acutely as it could be inherited. But his adherence to the principles of healing and the values embraced by NDORH transformed him into a global leader committed to peace, justice, and equality. He will be missed.

His powerful legacy tells us that there is hope that others can also transform and make our world a better, more just place in the future.

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### **About NCHE**

Founded in 2014, NCHE was established to promote health equity through action, leadership, inclusion, and collaboration. NCHE works to create environments that foster the best possible health outcomes for all populations, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or nativity. NCHE also works to improve conditions for health and well-being, including housing, education, income and wealth, and the physical and social environment. Further, NCHE believes that it is imperative that we address historical and contemporary structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism, which fuels inequities in our society.