

DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20511

January 14, 2010

*The following message by Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair was sent to employees of the United States Intelligence Community on the occasion of the commemoration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:*

Colleagues:

On April 16, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a renowned African American civil rights leader, wrote a letter that is considered a cornerstone of the civil rights movement. From his jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama where he was arrested for his part in a planned non-violent protest against racial segregation, Dr. King responded to his critics, maintaining that without non-violent, forceful, direct actions such as his, true civil rights could never be achieved. This outstanding leader and devoted philanthropist delivered over 2,500 speeches against racial injustice, and authored five books and numerous articles that addressed civil rights. In 1964 at the age of 35, Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize. For 11 years – from 1957 until his assassination in 1968 – Dr. King led the civil rights movement and paved the way for equality.

Forty years after Dr. King's death, Barack Obama, elected as the first African American U.S. President, was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. During his acceptance speech in Oslo, Norway, the President recognized Dr. King's leadership in civil rights and said that the movement "helped put the wind behind the sails." President Obama credited the civil rights movement as being largely responsible for his and the First Lady's presence in Oslo that evening.

Dr. King believed in world peace and respect and inclusion of all people. Today, as we celebrate the birthday of Dr. King and reflect upon his extraordinary life and legacy, we must renew our commitment to the ideal that we will not judge people by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Indeed, our IC mission depends upon our ability to build an agile and diverse workforce that values differences among individuals.

The importance of leadership's commitment to and active support of diversity cannot be overstated. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths and a mission critical imperative. Employing and retaining a diverse workforce in its broadest context – cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, heritage, race, gender, generations, orientation, abilities and ideas – is essential to addressing increasingly complex national security threats. Our workforce needs to mirror our nation and the world within which we operate.

Today we celebrate Dr. King's legacy and sacrifice; a lifetime that he so bravely and selflessly gave for a better world. Today, we come together to embrace and celebrate one Nation, one Mission, one Equality.

Dennis C. Blair