

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Speech

This speech was delivered by Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Englewood, NJ on January 18, 2010.

Reverend, clergy, lay leaders, elected officials, past and present, church members and guests.

Good morning. Thank you so much for inviting me again – to the beautiful Ebenezer Baptist Church and allowing me to join you in commemorating the life of one of America’s greatest national heroes: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Normally, on this day we reflect upon how far we’ve come as a nation in living up to the hopes and dreams that Dr. King had for us and for our country.

Today is normally a day, when we take stock not only of America’s successes in the march toward equal treatment, equal opportunity, and equal justice, but also its shortcomings in those areas. And we know that there are still many obstacles that we must overcome here in America: hunger, homelessness, hopelessness, unemployment, discrimination, and crime.

However, as I considered some of Dr. King’s words while thinking about today’s brief remarks, I found myself returning again and again to the heartbreaking tragedy that is occurring now in the nation of Haiti.

After all, Dr. King said: “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be, until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

As you all know, this past Tuesday, a terrible earthquake caused horrific death and destruction in Haiti. Between thirty and fifty thousand people have died, so far. The survivors have limited access to food, water, shelter, and security. Schools, hospitals, homes and government buildings have been destroyed.

Dr. King was right – we are and we must recognize that we are connected to the people of Haiti and that the suffering of the Haitian people must move us all not just to good words, but effective action. President Obama has acted swiftly and effectively, sending men and women from the U.S. Army, Navy and Coast Guard to provide supplies, medical care and security to the Haitian people, but we all need to do our part to help those enduring their darkest hours.

Should you wish to help the people of Haiti, my congressional offices in Hackensack and Washington DC, stand ready to assist as we have already assisted many many others. We can put you in touch with the right people, in the right organizations, or simply give you the correct information on where to send a contribution.

In conclusion, today and under these circumstances, it is now even more necessary to remember Dr. King’s words when he said: “I just want to do God’s will.” Well, God told us to love one another, to take care of each other, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless and comfort the bereaved.

We must do that today for the people of Haiti and everyday for our neighbors here in America and around the world.

God bless your church for all that you are doing and God bless the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.