

**Statement by
Bishop Thomas Hoyt, Jr., President
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.**

Good morning, my name is Bishop Thomas Hoyt, Jr., of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and President of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. It is an honor to be standing with you this morning. The National Council of Churches of Christ is made up of 36 Protestant and Orthodox communions whose constituent membership is more than 50 million Christians in the United States.

I was invited here today because the NCC has supported the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and member church communions as they endeavor to bring justice into the agri-food industry and well-being to the workers that pick tomatoes.

Friends, "one of the great travesties of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of the status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions." They are modern day Rip Van Winkles. "But today our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change. The large house in which we live demands that we transform this world-wide neighborhood into a world-wide brotherhood. Together we must learn to live as brothers (and sisters) or together we will be forced to die together as fools." So said the great prophet of civil and human rights, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The civil rights movement taught us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. That we must keep awake and face the challenge of change and his words echo down to us today. Because some of us are still sleeping!

But this morning a wake-up call is being made to the agri-food industry. And the alarm is sounding first in the headquarters of Yum! Brands. As the largest fast food company in the world, Yum! Brands is an industry leader in a fast-food industry whose fruit is exploitation.

Workers earning the same piece rate of 40 cents per bucket that they earned more than 20 years ago. Friends the alarm is ringing, and this is your wake-up call. Five cases of slavery in the past five years, and two new cases uncovered this past fall, friends the alarm is ringing, and this is your wake-up call. Across the nation ordinary folks are boycotting Taco Bell because we do not want to eat food tainted with the exploitation of our sisters and brothers. Friends the alarm is ringing, and this is your wake-up call.

It is the alarm of human conscience sounding, calling you to get up, stand up and help us create a world-wide family based on human rights. Of course you can keep on hitting the snooze. You can keep on saying "it's not my responsibility." You can keep on pretending that you don't have the power to do anything. You can procrastinate and suggest we do more studies. Yes my friends, you can keep on hitting that snooze. But if you do, you should know that this alarm will keep on ringing. For wherever people are exploited, wherever people are demeaned, wherever people are defrauded God is there. God is here. And God will not be silent. Friends this alarm is ringing, and this is your wake-up call.

This is an historic moment - a sacred moment when each and every one of us is called to decide: will we use our power to put an end to exploitation or will we hide ourselves among what Dr. King called the "fraternities of the indifferent?" Systems of economic commerce are larger than any one of us, yes, but they require all of us working together to change them. The workers can't do it alone. The government can't do it alone. The human rights leaders can't do it alone. The church can't do it alone. And the growers can't do it alone. Yum! Brands is the largest fast food company in the world with the largest food purchasing co-operative in the world that purchases solely for Yum! companies. Because of Yum! Brand's size and volume purchasing Mr. Novak we need your company to be a part of this solution. We need you to be an industry leader in ensuring human well-being.

Mr. Novak and Yum! Brands executives, together we can turn this around. As one beloved community, let's make justice good business.

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