

Dear all,

I would like to make some personal remarks to mark the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and many others, and recent national events.

I grew up in India and have spent my adult life in America. India and America have much in common: they are both democracies, populated by people with different religions, ethnicities, and cultures. Both India and America have given me life-enriching experiences that I am grateful for.

But the many benefits of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society are not equitably experienced. Many groups have shouldered excruciating burdens over centuries, most especially the enslavement of African Americans. While there has been some progress, recent events are a deeply painful reminder that we have a long way to go. Nevertheless, the passion and commitment of so many young people give me great cause for optimism. I was bombarded yesterday by text messages from my daughter, Menaka, insisting that I support the campaign to defund the police. I admire the energy and commitment to dialog I see in all of the young people who are speaking out.

Let me now address the question, “but what does this have to do with physics?” Not that long ago, physics used to be domain of a very small elite group of mostly European men (although, this was not so in the more distant past). Today, physics research is performed by a vibrant international community from all corners of the globe. I take great pride in being a part of this community, which is an example to the rest of society. When the American Physical Society March meeting was held in Boston a couple of years ago, it was inspiring to see a world map with pins from participants from just about every country in the world.

The International Center for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy has played a central role in spreading the cultural capital of physics, and this has brought great benefit to the intellectual life, in general, in many countries, making them part of a worldwide physics community. The work of the ICTP started with countries like India and China, but now extends to many countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Central America. But while physics has been remarkably successful on an international scale, we must admit that it has failed domestically here in America, leaving many under-represented groups, and especially African Americans out of this community.

I would like our department at Harvard to use the example of the ICTP on a domestic scale, and work towards a more inclusive physics community in our own country. The American Institute of Physics study (<https://www.aip.org/diversity-initiatives/team-up-task-force>) has many specific actions centered around Belonging, Physics Identity, Academic Support, Personal Support, and Leadership and Structures. To me, their recommendations make clear that it is crucial to have buy-in from *all* faculty, and that their small actions can combine to make a big difference to the careers of students. The issue and importance of Belonging resonates with me: when I arrived at MIT as a young student from India, it was the mentorship of a few faculty that made all the difference to my sense of belonging, and this is something I remain grateful for. I want that for every student in physics here and everywhere.

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