

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 14, 2021, 1:15 PM

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS
AT MASJID AT TAQWA FOR WEEKEND OF FAITH**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: *As-salaamu alaikum.*

Audience: *Wa-alaikum as-salaam.*

Mayor: It is an honor to be with all of you this day, as Ramadan is ending. And our First Lady will be joining us in just a moment, because we are near as part of something very, very special to us – what we call Weekend of Faith. This is a time – and because it's New York City, all faiths are engaged, are welcomed. Everybody matters in this city. I say to all my Muslim brothers and sisters, you matter to New York City. New York City needs you. You a part of what makes New York City great, and I say that to our brothers and sisters in all faiths. In Weekend of Faith, we reach out to everyone. We say we value faith communities. We value people of faith and we need to have a conversation together about a topic that's so often doesn't get heard in the open, and that's mental health.

This is a hard topic to talk about in America, and it's something we have to be honest about. In this country, for years, for generations, there's been a taboo, there's been a barrier. It's an invisible barrier that makes it hard for people to be open and honest about something that's very human and very natural, which is just like we have physical challenges and illnesses, we have mental health challenges. It's part of the human condition. This is an American problem. This is a New York City problem.

Now, when I talk to people from all over the world, each person tells me – well, in our culture, in our country, we struggle to talk about this. And what's so striking to me is that everyone says the same thing, wherever they come from – we struggle to talk about this. But we have to talk about it. And I know there are leaders who are focused on mental health, I thank you. I thank you. For everyone who's been a part of that, I thank you because people need that outreach, they need that dialogue. And our First Lady is joining us now. And she will join me and she'll really tell you why this is so important, because she's devoted herself over, now, eight years to reaching New Yorkers, to letting them know that help us there, that we can have this conversation, that it's okay and it's something we need to do for ourselves, and our families, and our communities. And that's made a world of difference.

But before I turn it to the First Lady, I want to say that, for eight years, we have believed that if we talk about mental health, we will heal together; that if we make it easy for people to get mental health services, families can stay together; the problems that seemed insurmountable can

be addressed. I'm sure the First Lady will mention the hotline, but I will too – 888-NYC-WELL, because we can't say it enough times. It's a place you can turn in any language, brothers and sisters – any language, 24-hours a day, seven days a week to get help. And why do people need help especially in this moment? Because of the stress of COVID, the pain we've all been through – every community has lost people, every one of us. Everyone knows someone in your family, a friend – if you lost someone to COVID, or you've seen the pain that COVID has created – someone who lost a job, someone who was sick. The stress that that's created, the fear that's created has also led to so many mental health challenges manifesting. The pain we see in the world around us in the Middle East, the ongoing tragedy of Syria, the horrible pain and loss we've seen our brothers and sisters in Yemen experiencing every day. We see Israelis and Palestinians, both losing their lives right now. We see children losing their lives. We need to gather to pray for peace and to renounce war, because war gets us nowhere, especially, when our children are suffering, our families are suffering. But meanwhile, here, across an ocean, we feel the stress too. We feel the pain too. And that just makes it even harder for all of us. So, if you feel the sorrow of the world, you see what our Asian brothers and sisters are going through with the hate crime, and it pains you – that's part of being human, to feel that pain with others. If it makes you stressed, if it makes you anxious, that's part of being human, because we're searching for answers. And we get answers from faith, but we also have answers we have to figure it out together. And if it makes you confused, if it makes you depressed, if it makes you anxious, that means you're a human being, but it also means you deserve help when you feel those things.

So, together – it's always about, in the end, finding a way together. And this city Chirlane and I have had the honor of serving for these last eight years – this city always brings back some of your hope, because, somehow, unlike almost any place else in the world, we all have found a way here. It's not perfect – it's far from perfect, but we found a way to live together and to see each other, hear each other. Each year, we find a way to respect each other a little more. That is our hope. That is our future. So, as we end this holiday season, I hope everyone in the time of reflection you've had, I hope you feel as we start to come out of COVID, as we start to overcome it together, that there's a new hope. There will be a recovery. There will be something better and we will do something different, because we learned in this crisis. Maybe we learned a little bit how much we depend on each other and how much we have to have a society of even greater equality and respect for each other.

I turn to the First Lady, but first I say *jumma mubarak* – had to get that in. And as I turned to my wife, I want to let you know, today is our 27th wedding anniversary.

[Applause]

Thank you. And 27 amazing years together. And my love for Chirlane, and my respect for Chirlane grows every single year more, and more, and more.

[Applause]

And as I hand her the microphone, I have a simple message. She said, we could defeat the stigma and we could help people get the help they deserve. And then she proceeded to do it. That's what is so amazing. Our First Lady, Chirlane McCray –

[Applause]

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill. We are all in this together. And I am so pleased and honored to be able to share our 27th anniversary with you along with everything else. *As-salaamu alaikum.*

Audience: *Wa-alaikum as-salaam.*

First Lady McCray: *Jumma mubarak.*

Audience: *Jumma mubarak.*

First Lady McCray: Thank you. Thank you. I want to thank all of you for welcoming us today in worship. And I also [inaudible] Imam Siraj – it is an honor, such a deep honor to be with you to celebrate this Weekend of Faith on Mental Health. And I celebrate everyone who is here – able to be here today, because we have spoken so often in the past about the need for community and the importance of being here for each other – and that is something that you have always embraced, from bringing families care, love, and support, to helping keep our streets safe. And I know we celebrate today in a difficult moment, one of fear and mourning for so many Muslims here and around the world. On the heels of this pandemic and what has already been a difficult year, more violence, more hostility and violence, the loss of life is heartbreaking.

Every person deserves dignity and the right to live peacefully – oh, thank you – and when people are hurting, whether it is here or thousands of miles away, the pain and the trauma born of hostility and violence is shared. There's an African proverb that I love. It says, the rain does not fall on one roof alone. It doesn't. We all feel when someone else is suffering and that's – this particular kind of suffering as a very heavy weight, a weight that's impossible to carry alone. And whatever you are feeling, each one of you in this moment, my heart, our hearts reach out to you.

The strength of the connection that we have with you, the strength of the connection that we have with each other is such a blessing. With community you can name the fears, the anger, and the sorrows and bend – bend with the suffering, not break, bend. With community, we are reminded to focus on what we can control and what we must do to keep ourselves physically and emotionally healthy and whole. With community, it is easier just to continue loving, learning, working, and supporting our families. And that is what this Weekend of Faith has always been about. How do we keep ourselves healthy physically and emotionally? And this year, our final Weekend of Faith means so much to me. This is a chance to celebrate all we have done together, decreasing the stigma around mental illness, substance use, and addiction, raising awareness for mental health and connecting people to support.

Back in 2016, which feels like a lifetime ago, we did not dream that 1,000 housing houses of worship would take part in the first Weekend of Faith. We certainly did not expect that number to double the next year. And when COVID hit, we didn't imagine that so many houses of worship would quickly adapt with us last summer as we went virtual. And, of course, the reason

for this strong connection with communities of faith all over the city, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, is that we share a common purpose. We feel the love. We feel the call to love our neighbors. We all want to live our best lives. We want to be healthy, and there is no health without mental health. We all want that and want – and we need that sense of warmth and community to know that we are not alone. So often that starts in a house of worship, in a masjid, a church, a temple, a gurdwara. How many of you have turned to an imam or another faith leader during a mental health challenge? How many of you? Do I see a hand? I see some hands. I certainly have. How many of you received emotional support from the masjid, a hand? Well, that is why this partnership has been so powerful. We have amazing leaders across so many houses of worship spreading the word.

And now is the moment to do more, which is why our administration has announced Mental Health for All. We are going to screen every child this fall, as they go back into the classroom to make sure they have the social, emotional, and academic support that they need. They're going to get much more personal attention because we know that our children, when they walk into the classroom, they're not just carrying a backpack, right? They carry everything that they're feeling, everything that they have gone through. They feel everything adults feel even when they don't have the words for it. So, we're going to make sure that they get the attention that they need. We will check every New Yorker who's getting vaccinated to ask how they are feeling and connect them to care if they need help. And as my husband has reminded you, and I hope you all remember the free, confidential number to call any time of day or night, if you ever need information or resources or counseling that's not otherwise available to you, you can call 1-888-NYC-WELL. Again, it's free and confidential. Will you say the number with me?

Everyone: 1-888-NYC-WELL.

First Lady McCray: Can we do that one more time?

Everyone: 1-888-NYC-WELL.

First Lady McCray: Please remember it, share it with your family, share it with your neighbors. You never know when someone might need someone to call, someone to reach out to. And so often that call is the first step to getting the help that people need. Although this is the last Weekend of Faith – I'm like getting a little emotional – the last Weekend of Faith for the Mayor and me, the mission continues and I'm counting on all of you to continue this mission. Our partners in faith will continue to play a crucial role, sharing resources, being there to help guide New Yorkers. But we need each one of you to do this work, too. Everyone has a role to play in mental health, everyone. And I know you've already said so much, but we're both so grateful to all of you, the role that you've played in making our city stronger, the role you played in this mental health outreach and effort. I hope you will remember us and keep that in your hearts.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

###