

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS
AT THE NEW YORK CITY COVID-19 DAY OF REMEMBRANCE**

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Good evening, everyone. This is a difficult night for so many families, but it is such an important one too. For all COVID has stolen from us, one of the hardest realities is not being able to grieve together. The funerals, the memorials, the rituals, where we lean on each other, those are moments when the healing begins. The photos of our lost ones remind us why.

You know, Mayor David Dinkins used to call our city the gorgeous mosaic. Those photos are people of every faith, culture, color, country of origin. To look at the mosaic is to feel the sorrow this virus has brought to every community, every home in our city. One in three Americans has lost someone to COVID. Here in our city, which was the epicenter for so long, we have lost too many and too much.

I spoke with a minister in the Bronx last year, Minister Onleilove Chika Alston, who serves at Beth-El, the House of Yahweh. She told me how overwhelming it felt as cases piled up in her congregation. In a span of two weeks, she lost three friends she worked with closely for years. How can anyone begin to address that kind of pain? Minister Onleilove said, 'I could not do it alone.' She sought care for herself so that she could continue helping her community keep the faith.

I remember talking to a Brooklyn doctor who confessed, how helpless he and his team felt as professionals, professionals who had committed their lives to restoring health, but they were losing some of their own coworkers. Yet, they kept going in spite of the long hours, the fatigue, the enormous pressure. They showed up because we needed them, and they kept on saving lives. These stories move me because in every story of loss, there was also bravery, solidarity, and hope, and there is love for those we lost that will never go away.

Tonight, we grieve with every New Yorker who has lost someone. We grieve together and we love those who have lost together. Maya Angelou once told us a great soul never dies, it brings us together again and again. These great souls have brought us together as a city tonight, and they will join us again and again, as we move forward together.

Thank you.

[...]

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I ask everyone, together this whole city together, let's have a moment of silence for all those we loved and all those we lost.

[Mayor de Blasio leads moment of silence]

Every morning, the first thing I see is a list and there are numbers on it, but what it really means is how many people we lost, how many New Yorkers are gone, how many neighbors, how many members of our family. Today, that number is more than 30,000. It's a number we can barely imagine. More New Yorkers lost than in World War II, Vietnam, Hurricane Sandy, and 9/11 put together.

Every family touched in some way. And for so many families, a pain – a pain that is raw. And yet New Yorkers are always there for each other. And tonight, so many people have gathered to show their love, to show their support for the family members left behind. I want to thank everybody who created this memorial as a labor of love, everyone who spoke, everyone who played a piece of music to comfort us. Everyone who created something to give something back to their fellow New Yorkers.

I have a vivid memory. Last May, I went to visit Queensbridge Houses, NYCHA. And as I walked through the development, a resident came up to talk to me and then another member of the community came around and then another and another. And I found myself a part of a circle. And everyone in the circle was mourning. Everyone in the circle had lost someone. They told me about an aunt or an uncle, a grandma. And then they told me the hardest part was they could not mourn together. And they felt the pain, the loss. And that moment was one of those times where it became clear just how deep this pain was for all of us, how much the virus has stolen from us.

But then when people start telling the stories of those they loved, a little joy starts to come back into their voice. A little smile comes across their face. It reminds me of a beautiful passage from Gabriel García Márquez. And he said this about grief.

“Páse lo qué páse, nádie puéde quitárte los báiles qué ya has ténido.”

“No matter what, no one can take away the dances we've already had.”

I think about a dear friend, my college roommate, Tom, who fell in love with a renowned New Yorker, a legend, the playwright, Terrence McNally. And when he lost Terrence, I called him and he said, he couldn't believe he was gone, but he knew that Terrence had left such an imprint

on so many people, had uplifted and enlightened New Yorkers and people of the world round. And he knew that joy, that hope will continue. His work will go on.

And every single one of them, everyone we've lost, what they did goes on, what they contributed, what they created, the love they gave goes on. The teachers we lost, the educators, what they gave to young people, it's carried on every day. The faith leaders, our clergy. When we lost them, their congregations carry them on in their hearts and in their faith. The health care heroes, those who are there for us, no matter what – and we lost some of those good souls, but they saved lives, and there are people walking around today because a doctor or a nurse was there for them, or an EMT or paramedic. The people walking around today, they carry the hearts of those we've lost with them.

The moms, the dads, the grandparents, all that was great about them, all that was warm, their souls continue on in their sons and daughters and then their grandchildren. And so, it is to all of us to do something very simple, very beautiful, very powerful. It is time to make them proud.

Es el momento de hacérlos orgullóso.

Shoulder to shoulder, one for another, we will bring our city back together. Thank you and God bless you all.

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