Dear Elliott School Community,

Today, the Elliott School joins GW and the world in celebrating the life and legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the 27th annual MLK Day of Service.

We celebrate Dr. King most notably as a leading civil rights icon in the United States; however, some might be less aware of Dr. King’s contributions as an international human rights leader who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

And Dr. King himself drew upon international influences as he developed his philosophy of change. In 1959, just three years after the Montgomery bus boycott, King made what he considered a pilgrimage to India in order to learn more about Mohandas K. “Mahatma” Gandhi, whose commitment to nonviolent social change inspired King as a seminary student. King’s month-long trip profoundly influenced his understanding of nonviolent resistance and his commitment to America’s struggle for civil rights.

In his Nobel Peace Prize address, Dr. King drew parallels between racial injustice in the United States, and the freedom movements around the world bringing an end to the colonial era. His Nobel Peace Prize lecture is worth reading in full as we consider Dr. King’s legacy. His identification of the “spiritual and moral lag” of his era contrasted with continued technological improvements of the time gives one pause today with the same weight: “We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers.”

As an international affairs school, we underscore Dr. King’s philosophy and approach of nonviolence and reflect on how his own international experiences shaped both his life and practice, and how he in turn shaped the world. As part of the GW celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members are invited to participate in a day of service and leadership development, Monday, January 17th. This event will be virtual. Students are encouraged to register.

Additionally, please join us Thursday, January 27th to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy during a virtual discussion of leadership and ethical challenges faced in the Southern Freedom Movement with Dr. Mary King, co-sponsored by the LEAP Initiative and Elliott’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

May we all continue to dedicate ourselves to the “simple art of living together.”

In service,

Alyssa Ayres
Dean, Elliott School of International Affairs