We, the Executive Board of the Graduate Student Assembly, strongly condemn the recent senseless, horrific murders of Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Those three innocent individuals are a mere subset of countless others whose lives have been violently cut short under similar circumstances that clearly highlight the racism, prejudice, and police brutality exerted towards African Americans and people of color, and the systemic, institutional injustice that have equipped the perpetrators with the confidence to resort to the use of lethal force given the comfort that the system will not hold them accountable for their actions. No one should live in fear of being killed while exercising, sleeping in their own beds, or simply going about their lives. Not every law enforcement interaction with Black individuals should have the potential to be carried out as a death sentence. We reject all acts of racism, hatred, and discrimination, and believe that fundamental changes to the systemic inequities that exist are long overdue.

We recognize that our own community is not exempt from the issues currently rocking the nation, and previous “quick fixes” have yet to have widespread impact. We commend the timely responses from our administration, and the incredible, exemplary show of solidarity the local community has demonstrated in the peaceful protest in support of the Black Lives Matter movement this past Monday, but we also believe this is a time to take serious actions and to act on those words. We believe that Virginia Tech, as an institution and as a community, must refuse to tolerate all forms of racism, of discrimination, and of the systematic injustices that exist all around us, and the impacts they have within our community, with our peers, our students, our faculty, and our staff across our campuses. We must ensure that our classrooms, research labs, offices and all other facilities are built and sustained to be safe, inclusive, and welcoming spaces for all members of our community, and hold individuals and entities that display any form of discrimination to the highest levels of accountability.

We at the GSA will continue to use our platform to advocate, meet and serve the changing needs of the Virginia Tech graduate and professional community. We are committed to addressing these issues, to educating ourselves, and to working closely in support of those within our communities who have been most impacted by those recent incidents (including, and not limited to the Black Organizations Council, the Black Student Alliance, the Black Graduate Student Organization, the African Graduate Student Organization, and the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus). Over the past few days, we have received a tremendous amount of correspondence from our constituents, both who have been impacted by the events expressing their concerns and those looking for opportunities and ways to offer support. We encourage all graduate and professional students to continue to reach out to us with their concerns and initiatives at gsa@vt.edu as we look to a path moving forward where we act to enact change and not simply observe and condemn. We ask our Delegates and our representative in the University’s Shared Governance to take the lead on driving those changes within their departments, committees and commissions and ensuring we amplify the voices of those who need to be heard and give voice to those who don’t have a voice.

We hope that we emerge from those trying times as a better, more equitable and more inclusive community, nation, and world where justice is served and where equal treatment and equal opportunity for all is the normal, not rights that needs to be demanded.