

UN Human Rights Office Consultation with Civil Society on HRC Resolution 43/1
Presentation on Police Brutality and Abuse
By Cliff Kuumba, Maryland State Facilitator, Sixth Region Diaspora Caucus (SRDC)
Thursday, February 18, 2021



I'm Cliff Kuumba, known to my activist friends and associates as "Bro. Cliff". I am the Maryland State Facilitator and member of the National Secretariat of the **Sixth Region Diaspora Caucus**, a primarily-US-based grassroots civil society African Diaspora organization dedicated to finding ways to bring the unified voice of the Global African Diaspora of Continental Africans and African Descendants to the World Stage through organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union. We seek to accomplish this by holding Community Town Hall Meetings where we listen to the concerns and aspirations of members of the community, and through building Cooperative Coalitions with other local, national and international Pan-African organizations that share our vision of unity and uplift for African people and people of African descent. These are just a few of the organizations with which we are building cooperative relationships in an effort to accomplish our mission.

Environmental **Slavery** **Political** **Incarceration** **Disasters** **Police**



One key aspect of our work is to understand that Africans and people of African descent are beset by a common set of challenges and crises wherever we live in the world. While we are disproportionately impacted by environmental racism, human trafficking, political instability, mass incarceration, poor or negligent disaster response and other indicators of oppression, we're here today to discuss perhaps the most graphic of the crises we face: our disproportionate targeting and abuse by law enforcement, including murder and even mass murder.

I hope the information and perspective I share with you today will prove worthy of your attention. Some may think this is elementary or intuitively obvious, or should be considered common knowledge, but the fact that the issue of police brutality and abuse still exists after so much has been said, and the fact that this seems to vex many policymakers, activists and regular citizens, indicates to me that, for some reason, too few of us possess the clarity, or knowledge, or morality, or courage, to effectively deal with this problem.



The little bit of information I have to present here today primarily comes from what we commonly consider to be the "Diaspora", that is, North America, Central America, the Caribbean, South America and Europe. We are aware that Aboriginal peoples in Australia are often considered as African Diasporans, but we had not amassed police brutality data from Australia at the time we compiled this information. We know there is an ancient African presence in Asia and Oceania. And we know that police brutality occurs in the Continent of Africa, particularly with the demonstrations in Nigeria against the Special Anti Robbery Squad or SARS, and the political repression that has at times been directed against individuals such as Uganda's Bobi Wine. But what has captured the attention of the world has largely been cases in the United States. I'm sure we all know that the scourge of police corruption, brutality and violence goes much farther than this.



We know we're only scratching the surface when we speak of **Philando Castile** and **George Floyd** in Minnesota, **Eric Garner** and **Eleanor Bumpurs** in New York City, the **MOVE Family** in Philadelphia, **Michael Brown** in Ferguson, **Tamir Rice** in Cleveland, **Archie Elliott III**, **Freddie Gray** and **Tyrone West** in Baltimore, **Walter Scott** in South Carolina, **Breonna Taylor** in Louisville, **Adolph Grimes III** and **Ronald Madison** in New Orleans, **Sandra Bland** in Texas and **Oscar Grant** in Oakland. That's just all I had room for on this map.

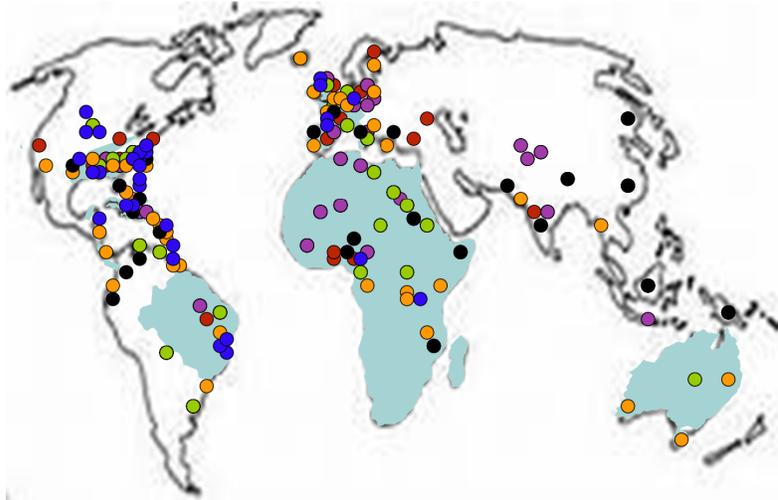


We know that there were more victims in Europe than just **Sheku Bayoh** and **Mzee Mohammed** in the UK, **Adama Traore** and **Amadou Koume** in France, and **Mitch Henriquez** in The Netherlands, but I'll bet that most people have never even heard of these cases.



And I would lay odds that most people have no idea who **Claudia da Silva Ferreira** was, or **Eduardo de Jesus**, or community activist and Brazilian legislator **Marielle Franco**, or that the per capita rate of deaths of African people at the hands of police in Brazil, a country with up to 80 million people or more of African descent, was estimated to be five times that of the United States, and where the state of Rio de Janeiro alone reportedly had as many police murders as the entire Continental United States in 2016.

Environmental Slavery Political Incarceration Disasters Police



We don't have time today to discuss the multiple indicators of oppression I mentioned earlier of environmental racism, human trafficking, political instability, mass incarceration and poor disaster response. But clearly, these various indicators act as "force multipliers" which undergird the systemic racism people of African descent face all around the world, and in many ways police corruption, brutality and violence help to enforce, and reinforce, these other indicators that are working to destroy quality of life for African people everywhere, including in the African Continent itself.

Add to all that the clear hypocrisy of unleashing pepper spray on gatherings at Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC so the US president can engage in a photo-op at a church and sending cops in riot gear against peaceful protesters of police violence while branding them "terrorists", and then failing (or refusing) to deploy law enforcement to defend the lives of legislators in the Capitol Building while it was under attack by "White Folks Gone Wild" on January 6.

A Failure or Refusal to Understand the Problem

- **Not just a United States Problem**
- **Occurs Wherever there are Large Populations of People of African Descent**
- **Police History Must be Understood and Admitted**
- **Police Culture Must be Changed**
- **Not a “Training Problem”**
- **A Personnel-Selection and Culture Problem**

Why does this problem seem to persist, despite the efforts of activists, organizers and global human rights bodies to stop it? It seems to boil down to a collective failure or refusal to understand the root of the problem. First, this is not just a problem in the United States, as we have seen. It occurs whenever and wherever people of African descent live in large enough numbers to be interpreted as a threat to Western European culture or tradition; "there goes the neighborhood" all over again. The history of police departments in the United States in particular being employed as the first "slave patrols" is important to remember here. Thus, this is not a "training" issue, which would primarily teach an officer a knowledge or skill such as how to properly apply a chokehold, or operate a weapon, or navigate the law in cases of the use of deadly force. No, this is a personnel and culture problem that must key on how police officers are selected in the first place and what influences the attitude of the average police officer in dealing with a population they might not understand. Having worked for 30 years in the areas of employee selection and employee training, I've seen where training ends and employee selection begins in matters such as these.

What the UN Can Do

- **Bring In the Voice of the Diaspora on an Official Level & Connect with Us**
- **Establish the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent**
- **Create More Ways for Grassroots Organizations to Engage WGEPAD**
- **Create Representative Seats in UN ECOSOC**
- **Use this Combined Influence to craft Sanctions that will Stick, not mere Resolutions with No Teeth and No Enforcement Power**

But in the end, the question for me almost always comes to: What can bodies like the United Nations do, especially if they do not possess the power of heads of state? It starts with taking a more concerted and effective effort to bring the voice of people of African descent to an official level and connecting better with those of us on the grassroots level, civil society. Complete the establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in the UN General Assembly and bring the voices you hear today, and others, into that body. Create more ways for grassroots organizations and activists to effectively engage with the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, and *listen* to them. Establish representative seats in the UN's civil-society body, the Economic and Social Council, much as the African Union started to do with its Economic, Social and Cultural Council, only with better follow-up and support. And use this combined influence to put international pressure on member states that fail to stamp out police corruption, abuse and brutality, to include the imposition of concrete sanctions as opposed to mere Resolutions with no teeth or enforcement power.

We are in the middle of the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, someone who, as I understand it, has dealt with the oppressive state herself and subsequently taken measures to enact reform in her home country when she was its President, has engaged with the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and other organizations, task forces and think tanks working on behalf of oppressed and under-represented peoples of the world. The United Nations must not squander this opportunity, when it has former heads of state, scholars, activists, organizers and an awakening civil society coalescing and preparing to spring into constructive action. Many of us have been awaiting the opportunity to engage in a positive way to bring our collective voice to the World Stage to lift up our people and the world. It's time to bring us all together and get moving.

Thank you for your time.

