Timeline

2016
Alton Sterling

1999
Amadou Diallo

2018
Stephon Clark

2020
George Floyd

2014
Ezell Ford

2018
Botham Jean

> Americans of African descent are three times more likely to be killed by police and 4.5 times more likely to be incarcerated compared to their white counterparts, according to the UN International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality's recent report.

Racist police

The UN International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement has recently released a report highlighting systemic racism against people of African descent in the United States police forces and criminal justice system. The report is based on the Mechanism's country visit that was accomplished earlier this year. Testimonies were gathered from 133 affected individuals, detention centers were visited, and meetings were held with various government and police authorities.

The report emphasizes that systemic racism is a pervasive issue that demands urgent reform. It asserts that racism in the US, stemming from the legacy of slavery and apartheid, persists today in the form of racial profiling, police killings, and other human rights violations.

Shockingly, Americans of African descent are three times more likely to be killed by police and 4.5 times more likely to be incarcerated compared to their white counterparts.

The report also criticizes the prevailing impunity for police officers, noting that only one percent of the over 1,000 cases of police killings each year result in charges. It rejects the notion that the problem lies solely with "bad apple" officers, highlighting evidence of a broader pattern of abusive behavior. The Mechanism calls for comprehensive reform within law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, emphasizing the need to address values, attitudes, and stereotypes prevalent in US society.

Additionally, the report suggests that armed police officers should not be the default responders to all social issues, advocating for alternative responses to policing, especially in cases involving mental health crises, homelessness, and school discipline. It also raises concerns about the impact of racism and racial discrimination on the mental health of police officers.

The report calls on police agencies to address systemic racism against Black law enforcement officers as well as the existence of the white supremacy ideology within their ranks. It expresses profound concern over instances such as life imprisonment for children of African descent, the chaining of pregnant women during childbirth, and prolonged solitary confinement. The report also highlights the prevention of voting rights for individuals who have completed their sentences and the use of forced labor in prisons as contemporary forms of slavery.

The Mechanism condemns not only the overuse of incarceration and criminal supervision but also the disproportionate representation of people of African descent jailed by the criminal justice system. It makes 30 recommendations to the US and its jurisdictions, urging comprehensive reform.

A habit of shooting innocents

The early hours of February 4, 1999, descended upon Amadou Diallo like a menacing shroud. The 23-year-old African student was standing near his building, unarmed, having just returned from eating a simple meal.

On those fateful hours, four New York police officers, Edward McMellon, Sean Carroll, Kenneth Boss, and Richard Murphy, were on the lookout for a serial rapist in the Soundview section of the Bronx.

As the officers' unmarked car crept along Wheeler Avenue, their eyes caught Diallo, who stood before his building entrance, casting prudent glances up and down the street. The officers decided to detain Diallo.

With commanding voices, they demanded that he reveal his hands, but in a moment of sheer panic, Diallo fled towards his building entrance, reaching into his pocket in a futile attempt to retrieve his wallet. Mistaking Diallo's innocent gesture for a draw of a firearm, one officer's finger tightened around the trigger, discharging a single shot as he ascended the stairs. The recoil of the weapon sent the officer staggering backward, while the remaining three officers, believing their comrade had been struck, unleashed a torrent of bullets from their own firearms.

The echoes of 41 shots rang through the night air. Eyewitness Sherrie Elliott attested that the barrage of gunfire persisted even after Diallo had crumpled to the ground.

A very long list

In examining the extensive roster of African Americans who have tragically succumbed to instances of police brutality in the United States, it becomes copiously clear that the recent report issued by the Expert Mechanism — which asserts the existence of "systemic racism" within American law enforcement and justice systems — should come as no shock.

From the heartbreaking cases of individuals such as Amadou Diallo and George Floyd — whose lives were unjustly cut short by police violence — to the stories of Daryl Hunt, Albert Woodfox, and Troy Davis — who fell victim to an unjust justice system — the list of casualties continues to grow. These individuals all share the unfortunate fate of becoming victims of a deeply ingrained systemic racism that appears to permeate the very essence of the United States of America.