



**Urgent Debate on "the current racially inspired human rights violations, systemic racism,  
police brutality and the violence against peaceful protest"**

**Joint Statement submitted by the American Civil Liberties Union**

**43rd Session of the Human Rights Council**

**June 17, 2020**

Ms. President:

American policing has never been a neutral institution. The first U.S. city police department was a slave patrol, and modern police forces have directed oppression and violence at Black people to enforce Jim Crow, wage the War on Drugs, and crack down on protests.

Policing in the United States originated in the slavery era when patrols were created to recapture runaway slaves, terrorize them in order to deter slave rebellion, and maintain a form of discipline for slave workers. Police often participated in or turned a blind eye to lynching and other acts of violence. While slavery formally ended June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 -- 155 years ago this week -- contemporary police and law enforcement in America in many ways continue to function as modern-day slave patrol: terrorizing Black people, killing with impunity, and criminalizing and controlling the lives of Black and poor communities.

Although having only recently gained the awareness it deserves from those outside the Black community, issues of race-based violence have long been woven into the fabric of American society. Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans, despite constituting only 13% of the population. They are also 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed when killed by police.

George Floyd's horrific murder has sparked an unstoppable global movement demanding concrete and bold actions to end racist policing practices and impunity for police violence.

While we recognize the global nature of racism and police violence and stand in full solidarity with victims of police violence everywhere, this Council must ensure that the outcome of this Urgent Debate is focused on efforts to hold the United States accountable. This is an opportunity to demonstrate that no State, no matter how powerful, is above scrutiny, and to demonstrate cross-regional support for the Council's integrity.

The Council should mandate the creation of an independent international accountability mechanism not only to document and investigate extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black people, but also heavily militarized police violence against protesters and journalists. Since May 26th, there have been over 400 instances of journalists being detained, assaulted, or otherwise prevented from performing their duties by police. Peaceful protesters have experienced injuries, and sometimes death, from tear gas, rubber bullets, and other crowd control tactics used by the police.

Partial or half-baked measures of accountability won't remedy structural racism. We therefore ask you to heed the demand of family members of victims of police violence, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, and Michael Brown, who together with more than 660 organizations from 66 countries around the world, asked you to hold this urgent session and mandate an effective accountability mechanism.

The protesters in the streets across the United States and around the world are demanding radical change; now is the time for accountability, for reimagining public safety and

the role of police in a democratic society. It's time to dismantle structural racism and invest in people and communities of color. We urge the Council to respond rapidly and effectively, and mandate an independent investigation into U.S. racist policing practices and suppression of peaceful protests. We cannot remain complicit in the oppression of Black Americans and must take immediate action to end this legacy of state-sanctioned violence.