

# **TALKING ABOUT POLICE USE OF FORCE IN THE UNITED STATES**

## **A GUIDE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS**

TODAY'S PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT THE UNLAWFUL USE OF FORCE BY POLICE IN THE UNITED STATES, AS REFLECTED IN MEDIA COVERAGE AND PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS, IS SHIFTING. THE PROTESTS IN BALTIMORE, FERGUSON, AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE IGNITED A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT THE PERSISTENT AND WIDESPREAD PATTERN OF RACIALLY DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT BY POLICE ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. THIS GUIDE IS A RESOURCE ON HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON OUR TERMS.

### **OUR SHARED STORY**

WE FACE A REAL MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES. FOR TRUE INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND UNITY, **WE MUST USE THIS TIME TO SHARE OUR STORY, BUILD COALITIONS, AND WHEN NECESSARY SPEAK IN SUPPORT OF EACH OTHER.** TOGETHER WE HAVE THE SOLUTIONS. LET'S TALK ABOUT THEM AND USE THEM TO INSPIRE PEOPLE INTO PEACEFUL ACTION THAT WILL COMPEL THE CHANGE WE SEEK.

TO BUILD AUTHENTIC COALITIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS, WE HAVE TO FIRST ACKNOWLEDGE OUR INDIVIDUAL ANGER AND FRUSTRATION. WE ALSO MUST USE THIS TIME TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE THE VOICES OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THE MOST IMPACTED POPULATION. WHILE WE MUST ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS WE FACE, OUR WORDS SHOULD ALSO FOCUS ON THE WORK AHEAD AND THE STEPS WE NEED TO TAKE TOGETHER TO **ENSURE THAT EVERYONE'S RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED IN THIS COUNTRY AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.**

TALK ABOUT SOLUTIONS AND HOW WE CAN GET THERE. TALK ABOUT ACTIONS THAT WE MUST TAKE IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD OUR VISION OF JUSTICE, FREEDOM, TRUTH, AND DIGNITY AS CENTRAL TO THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF ALL HUMAN BEINGS.

### **A NOTE ON AUDIENCE**

**THE "GENERAL PUBLIC" DOES NOT EXIST WHEN IT COMES TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS.** NONE OF US HAVE RESOURCES TO REACH EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE. EACH COMMUNICATION (CONVERSATION, MEDIA INTERVIEW, SOCIAL MEDIA POST, BLOG, ETC.) YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE LARGER STORY OF THE UNLAWFUL USE OF FORCE BY POLICE IN THE UNITED STATES SHOULD HAVE A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE IN MIND SUCH AS YOUTH, CONSTITUENTS IN A PARTICULAR DISTRICT, SPANISH LANGUAGE SPEAKERS, PARENTS, ETC.

**READ THE FULL REPORT AT  
[AMNESTYUSA.ORG/LETHALFORCEREPORT](https://www.amnestyusa.org/lethalforcereport)**



ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS YOU PREPARE YOUR COMMUNICATION:

- IS MY AUDIENCE SYMPATHETIC, HOSTILE OR UNDECIDED ABOUT THE ISSUE?
- HOW MUCH DO THEY KNOW ABOUT THE ISSUE?
- WHAT DO I WANT THEM TO DO?
- AM I USING THE BEST VENUE TO REACH THE AUDIENCE I NEED TO MAKE POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE?
- AM I THE RIGHT MESSENGER FOR THIS MESSAGE?

## SOLUTIONS

### WHAT DO WE WANT FROM STATE GOVERNMENTS?

- EVERY STATE SHOULD INTRODUCE OR AMEND THEIR LAWS THAT AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS BY **LIMITING THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE TO THOSE INSTANCES IN WHICH IT IS NECESSARY** TO PROTECT AGAINST A THREAT TO LIFE OR SERIOUS INJURY.
- STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES' INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE MUST BE **THOROUGH, TRANSPARENT, INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL**; AND CONCLUDED AS PROMPTLY AS POSSIBLE. IF THE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT THE KILLING WAS UNLAWFUL, THE POLICE OFFICER(S) RESPONSIBLE SHOULD BE CRIMINALLY PROSECUTED.
- ALL STATES SHOULD REQUIRE BY LAW THAT POLICE DEPARTMENTS **PUBLISH REGULAR STATISTICS** ON THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SHOT AND KILLED OR INJURED BY POLICE OFFICERS.
- EVERY STATE MUST HAVE ADEQUATE **PROTECTIONS IN PLACE AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**, INCLUDING LEGISLATION PROHIBITING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND PROFILING.

### WHAT DO WE WANT FROM POLICE DEPARTMENTS?

- POLICE DEPARTMENTS MUST REVIEW AND **REVISE CURRENT POLICIES, STANDARDS, PRACTICE, AND TRAINING** ON THE USE OF FORCE AND FIREARMS, TO ENSURE THAT THEY CONFORM FULLY TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS.
- POLICE DEPARTMENTS MUST REVIEW AND REVISE **LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICIES AND TRAINING RELATED TO RACE** AND POLICING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

### WHAT DO WE WANT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE?

- THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE MUST **ENSURE THE COLLECTION AND PUBLICATION OF NATIONWIDE STATISTICS ON POLICE SHOOTINGS** IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VIOLENT CRIME CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 1994 AND THE DEATH IN CUSTODY ACT OF 2014.

**READ THE FULL REPORT AT  
AMNESTYUSA.ORG/LETHALFORCEREPORT**



- THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE MUST REVIEW AND REVISE THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE'S GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF RACE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS TO **INCLUDE A COMPREHENSIVE BAN ON RACIAL PROFILING** BY FEDERAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES.
- THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE MUST REVIEW AND REVISE ALL FEDERAL POLICIES ON THE USE OF DEADLY FORCE, INCLUDING THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE'S GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF DEADLY FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS TO **ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW AND STANDARDS**, INCLUDING THE U.N. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS AND THE BASIC PRINCIPLES ON THE USE OF FORCE AND FIREARMS.
- THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE MUST **PURSU** **"PATTERN AND PRACTICE"** **INVESTIGATIONS** AGAINST POLICE AGENCIES NATIONWIDE THAT COMMIT WIDESPREAD ABUSES, INCLUDING AS PERTAINS TO THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE, PARTICULARLY AGAINST COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

## **WHAT DO WE WANT FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES?**

- THE PRESIDENT MUST **ESTABLISH A "NATIONAL CRIME AND JUSTICE TASK FORCE"** TO REVIEW AND EVALUATE ALL COMPONENTS OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, INCLUDING THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS.
- THE US CONGRESS MUST SUPPORT AND PROVIDE FUNDING FOR **THE CREATION OF A COMMISSION (THE "NATIONAL CRIME AND JUSTICE TASK FORCE")** AND ENSURE THAT IT REVIEWS AND MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT.
- THE US CONGRESS SHOULD TAKE LEGISLATIVE ACTION TO **ENSURE THAT ALL FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS RESTRICT THEIR USE OF LETHAL FORCE** IN COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS. THIS SHOULD INCLUDE ENACTING LEGISLATION REQUIRING ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO REVISE THEIR POLICIES AND LIMIT THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE TO THOSE INSTANCES WHERE IT IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT AGAINST THE THREAT OF DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY.
- THE US CONGRESS MUST **PASS THE POLICE REPORTING AND DATA EVIDENCE ACT, THE END RACIAL PROFILING ACT, THE STOP MILITARIZING LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT, AND THE PROTECTING COMMUNITIES AND POLICE ACT.**

**READ THE FULL REPORT AT  
AMNESTYUSA.ORG/LETHALFORCEREPORT**

## **IN OUR OWN WORDS**

**"POLICE OFFICERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR UPHOLDING THE LAW AND PROTECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY."**

**"RESPECTING AND PRESERVING HUMAN LIFE IS THE UTMOST OBLIGATION OF POLICE."**

**"POLICE OFFICERS HAVE DIFFICULT AND OFTEN DANGEROUS JOBS, BUT THE SHOOTING OF MICHAEL BROWN IN FERGUSON, MISSOURI AND COUNTLESS OTHERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES HAS HIGHLIGHTED A WIDESPREAD PATTERN OF RACIALLY DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN THE UNITED STATES."**

**"THE USE OF LETHAL FORCE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN THE UNITED STATES RAISES SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS, INCLUDING HOW IT IMPACTS THE RIGHT TO LIFE, THE RIGHT TO SECURITY OF THE PERSON, AND THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION."**

**"THE UNITED STATES HAS A LEGAL OBLIGATION TO RESPECT, PROTECT, AND FULFILL HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO LIFE, THE RIGHT TO SECURITY OF THE PERSON, AND THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION."**

**READ THE FULL REPORT AT  
[AMNESTYUSA.ORG/LETHALFORCEREPORT](https://www.amnestyusa.org/lethalforcereport)**

