

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

SUGGESTIONS FOR TALKING ABOUT POLICE USE OF FORCE

KEY MESSAGES

DEADLY FORCE & POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

- We need to stop the killing of Black people by police with systemic police reform to root out racism and radically change its approach to law enforcement and human rights.
- Officers responsible for excessive force and unlawful killings must be held accountable, now and forever. They must be immediately and independently investigated and the whole law enforcement system needs to be reformed to prevent future violence.
- Surviving an interaction with law enforcement shouldn't depend on where you live or the color of your skin. Stronger national standards must be adopted to restrict the use of lethal and excessive force and to ensure accountability when these boundaries are breached.
- Congress must work to pass the PEACE Act, because law enforcement should reserve force as a last option not a first response.
- The federal government should use the power of its purse to encourage states to adopt stronger protocols to greatly limit the use of lethal and excessive force by cutting federal funds to state law enforcement that fail to meet higher standards for police conduct.

RIGHT TO PROTEST

- Abusive policing is violating people's human rights daily out on the streets. We demand authorities stop violating obligations to ensure people's right to peacefully protest killings by police, and the right of journalists to cover them.
- Police need to de-escalate and stop meeting protesters with violence and excessive force. The use of tear gas, rubber bullets and militarized weapons against peaceful protesters should cease immediately.
- Police have a responsibility to facilitate the right to protest--not quash it. By exacerbating a tense situation and endangering the lives of protesters, police in the U.S. are failing their obligations under international law.

DOS AND DON'TS

DO:

- Talk about the systemic issues and historical context.
- Talk about human stories and instances of human rights abuses -- don't focus only on the numbers.
- Honor and include intersectional identities of Black people fighting for their human rights, like Black asylum-seekers, Black trans women, Black refugees, and undocumented Black communities.
- Make sure every call to action and message focuses on systemic issues and the need to bring the U.S. into compliance with international standards around lethal force by police.
- Frame the massive wave of protests as the enduring hope Americans have for change -- solidarity across age, race, geography, etc.

DON'T:

- Don't use the term African-American -- use "Black people" instead. *Note that the term "Black" can have different connotations in different cultural contexts and can be interpreted differently.*
- Don't reduce George Floyd to only his last words. Speak about him as a whole person, and rather than noting that he was unarmed, acknowledge that he posed no threat.
- Don't talk about looting and property destruction, unless asked, and if asked, note that while Amnesty doesn't condone violence, our focus must remain on the destruction of human life.
- Don't use President Trump's words, unless asked.
- Don't try to fact-check narratives. Speak about the way the system should be overhauled.
- Don't use the term "police brutality", do describe what happened. Use active verbs: the *police shot*, the *military used* tear gas, etc.
- Don't speak about whether George Floyd was guilty of the forgery charge that has been used to justify his treatment.