**Statement in response to the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests**

We the undersigned write to join the condemnation of the brutal murder of George Floyd and to support the calls for justice and accountability by his family, Black Lives Matter and by the wider Black community and others in the US and in this country. We also condemn the violence used by state forces against protestors and journalists*.*

We are civil rights and civil liberties lawyers and organisations and campaigners based in the UK. In our work, we see time and again what INQUEST described in its statement on George Floyd: ‘*a pattern of cases synonymous with state violence, structural racism, impunity and injustice’.* This is no surprise given the history of slavery and colonialism, old and new, which is the broader context of the systemic and institutional racism faced by Black people in this country and in the US. We also see the role of popular protest movements in bringing about social, political and legal progress.

We have worked with the families of many people who have died as a result of state violence. INQUEST has documented how a disproportionate number of Black people, in particular Black men, have died as a result of use of force. The list is many. Just some of these deaths include:

* Children in detention – for example, 15-year-old Gareth Myatt restrained to death by G4S staff in a child prison;
* Black women who have died after police operations: Cynthia Jarrett, Cherry Groce, and Joy Gardner bound and gagged after a police/immigration raid.
* Black men restrained to death by police officers - for example, Christopher Alder, Roger Sylvester, Mikey Powell, Sean Rigg, Olaseni Lewis, Kingsley Burrell; Rocky Bennett restrained by medical staff in a mental health setting (showing the double discrimination faced by Black men suffering mental ill-health); and others who have died since, Leon Briggs, Sheku Bayoh, Kevin Clarke.
* Black women in mental health crisis (so facing triple discrimination) – for example Sarah Reed, a young woman remanded for psychiatric reports who died because of neglect and ill treatment by prison and healthcare at Holloway prison; and deaths of two Black women, Annabella Landsberg and Natasha Chin, as a result of neglect and failings of prison and healthcare staff.
* Black men shot dead by the police – for example, Azelle Rodney, Mark Duggan; and others since, Jermaine Baker and Trevor Smith.
* Immigration detainees - for example, Jimmy Mubenga restrained to death by G4S staff trying to deport him; Prince Fosu who died from neglect having been left naked in a Harmondsworth immigration removal centre cell for 6 days without bedding or a mattress.

We note that Black men have suffered catastrophic injuries and almost died following police restraint – for example, Julian Cole requires 24 hour care after he suffered a broken neck and is paralysed and has brain damage.

We have also seen time and again a shocking lack of accountability of individual state agents responsible for state abuses. Many inquests into state-inflicted deaths, including some of those referred to above, have returned conclusions highly critical of the ‘unlawful’ and ‘excessive’ or ‘disproportionate’ force used, or found serious neglect. However disciplinary action and/or criminal charges are rare and criminal convictions rarer still. Since 1990 there has been no successful prosecution for murder or manslaughter. Such disciplinary processes as there have been rarely result in effective sanctions against the officers involved. In addition, the various iterations of the police watchdog over the years have consistently failed to address race adequately or at all in their investigations.

As Aji Lewis, the mother of Olaseni Lewis who died after police use of restraint in a mental health setting while medical staff stood by, said: *“It might be more of a deterrent if police were genuinely concerned about facing charges. They pretend there isn’t institutional racism in the police, but we all know it’s there. Police need to admit mistakes. Officers need to be prosecuted.”*

It has been family campaigns alongside work by INQUEST and campaigning lawyers that has put this issue on the political and policy agenda. It prompted the government to set up the Angiolini review of deaths and serious incidents into police custody. Published in 2017, it wasan indictment of the failing systems of investigation, learning and accountability and also reinforced concerns about how a disproportionate number of people from Black and minority ethnic communities, in particular Black men, have died after the use of force. It made over 100 recommendations extending to the police service, health service and justice systems. Concerns raised included the inequality of arms and access to justice for bereaved people; the failure to investigate deaths as a potential crime and the related issue of police officers being permitted to confer with each other after deaths; and the serious delays in the legal processes.

The experiences of the families and communities we work with stand in stark contrast to the statement of the National Police Chiefs Council, extending solidarity and sympathy to the family of George Floyd, and calling for accountability in that case, whilst police forces continue to resist accountability, withhold evidence and dispute liability for deaths at their hands in the UK. In many cases, far from seeking to hold those responsible to account, undercover police officers have gathered evidence on bereaved families and infiltrated campaigns for justice.

Time and again, after state-inflicted deaths and a plethora of recommendations from investigations, inquests and reviews, promises are made by the authorities responsible, that lesson learning, accountability and action will follow. For the families, every new death gives the lie to this promise and causes new pain. We think of them as we follow the news about George Floyd.

We also see consistent evidence that deaths are the extreme end of a continuum of pervasive racial bias in the criminal justice system from over-policing, stop and search and criminalisation.

* In 2018/2019 Black people were more than 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people;
* 26% of all use of force by police officers between 2018/2019 was on Black and minority ethnic people, (16% of which Black, 6% Asian);
* An FOI request in 2017 revealed that in a three-month trial on the use of spit hoods (a tool of repression reminiscent of slavery), 23% of male victims were Black and 15% Asian (total 38%); 72% of female victims were Black (8 out of 11);
* In relation to Covid-related arrests, Black and minority ethnic people were nearly 50% more likely than white people to be arrested in London using coronavirus laws. Black people make up 12% of the population of London but received 26% of the 973 fines handed out by police and accounted for 31% of arrests;
* Recently we have seen investigations being opened into the disproportionate use of Tasers against Black people.

Behind these statistics are the human stories: we cannot underestimate the impact of state brutality and harassment, based on the colour of your skin, on the individual psyche.

Black and minority ethnic people are also disproportionately incarcerated in prisons and young offender institutions. The Lammy Review on race in the criminal justice system raised the alarm on this issue, yet since publication of this review numbers have increased, with Black and minority ethnic people making up 27% of the prison population and 50% of children and young people in child prisons/young offender institutions. In the year ending March 2019, 27.8% of people in youth custody were Black.

We note that the UK has one of the largest immigration detention systems in Europe and the impact of unjustified, often unlawful indefinite detention on psychological and physical health has been well documented and evidenced by a pattern of deaths. We also note the impact of the hostile environment that saw so many Black people of the Windrush generation wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights.

We note too, the socio-economic disadvantage and structural racism and inequalities that disproportionately affect Black and minority ethnic people, with the associated negative impact upon education (the school to prison pipeline), employment and - brought into particularly sharp relief by the Covid-19 pandemic - health outcomes. In that connection, we note the prompt action by the state towards criminalising anti-racist protests on the grounds of Covid risk, in stark contrast to the state *inaction*, for example in relation to PPE, in the face of mounting evidence that Black and minority ethnic people were disproportionately dying from the virus.

But we also remember that there is reason to be hopeful in the new generations coming on to the streets to fight for justice. We stand with them and pay tribute to them. We remember the anti-racist resistance across the years in Brixton, Bradford, Chapeltown, Southall, St Pauls, Tottenham, Toxteth, and other predominantly Black and minority ethnic areas of Britain’s inner cities. We remember the resulting introduction of the Race Relations Act, the Scarman report. We remember the Macpherson report finding that the Metropolitan police was institutionally racist and the strengthening of discrimination law, brought about by the fight for justice for Stephen Lawrence. It is only through such struggles, led by those at the sharp end of injustice in our society, that the same civil and human rights taken for granted by the privileged can be won for all.

Finally, we acknowledge the importance of this moment. Deaths in state custody and state violence is a global human rights issue, disproportionally impacting on Black and Indigenous people. With the rise of racist and reactionary forces world-wide, now more than ever we must stand together to defend the right to freedom from state racism and state brutality, and the right to state accountability when those rights are violated. Crucially, we must also defend the right to protest and to press freedom, without which those other rights risk being rendered illusory. We note that it is the same repressive apparatus that killed George Floyd that is now being used against protestors and journalists and that it is the UK government who are exporting to the US, repressive state equipment, including tear gas, rubber bullets and riot shields.

This is a social movement that must see radical structural change. We owe it to those men, women and children who have had their lives cut short or have been harmed as a result of state violence.

The struggle to defend the right to protest and to a free press goes hand in hand with the struggle for justice for George Floyd.

Justice for George Floyd means justice for us all.

INQUEST

Police Action Lawyers Group

Inquest Lawyers Group Steering Committee

United Friends and Families Campaign (UFFC)

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