

8th session of the Forum on Minority Issues

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Good afternoon Mr president, thank you for granting me this opportunity to speak today. I will be speaking specifically about the situation of black people in the United States. Black people, or people of African descent make up 13 percent of the population in the United States, yet comprise approximately 40 percent of people incarcerated. There are more African-American men incarcerated in the United States than the total prison populations in India, Argentina, Canada, Lebanon, Japan, Germany, Finland, Israel and England, all combined. For black women, the imprisonment rate is twice that of white women. The race disparities that we see in incarceration are reflected at every stage of the criminal justice system, from racial profiling, to police stops, to arrests, to detentions, sentencing and death penalty. They are also reflected in the disproportionate extra-judicial killings of black people at the hands of the police. One of the underlying reasons for the overincarceration of African-Americans is the criminalisation of petty and minor offenses. A significant portion of interactions that the black community has with police comes from a style of policing called broken windows. And this is essentially an approach to law enforcement that focuses on policing minor or petty crimes on the assumption that it will help prevent major crimes.

The result has been a significant increase in arrests of African-American from minor offenses, including selling loose cigarettes. Another underlined issue of concern is the prevailing police culture of impunity. Of the 1,027 killings by police this year alone, only about a dozen officers have been charged with murder or manslaughter. Just yesterday, we learned that a white Chicago police officer has been charged with murder in a shooting to death black teenager, Laquan McDonald, who was shot sixteen times. This incident came just one day before a deadline ordering the City of Chicago to release a video of the incident. People who have seen the video relay that he was walking away and the autopsy confirms that he was shot in the back. The same police officer has had at least 15 complaints filed against him for accusations. The question is then: Why was no action taken to reprimand or protect the public from this police officer after 15 complaints? Why does it take a forced release of a video of an incriminating video of a police officer to be charged with a crime? This failure to hold law enforcement accountable is linked to the continued failure to administer that is free of racial discrimination.

We have two recommendations to make: the first is that broken windows policing be eliminated as a practice. The second is that we recommend the United States and all other Member States fully implement their obligations under ICESCR and the programme of activities for the international decade for people of African descent.