



December 10, 2014

STATEMENT OF THE BOARD

“AMERICAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM NEEDS MORE THAN BODY CAMERAS”

The deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown and the decisions by the related grand juries highlight again exchanges this summer between the U.S. Government and the reviewing committee of the United Nations on racial discrimination. The U.S. Government presented a [report to the United Nations](#) in August on its implementation of the [International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#). Despite progress, the reviewing committee asserted¹ and the U.S agreed² there are **“stark racial disparities in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system, including the disproportionate number of persons belonging to racial, ethnic and national minorities in the prison population.”**

The UNA Southern NYS Division¹ and over 90 other organizations submitted related reports. Our report, [“Race and the American Criminal Justice System,”](#) was based on a seminar with several co-sponsors; it highlights important problems and gives possible solutions.

Racism is endemic to the American criminal justice system in many ways, and must be addressed aggressively and with urgency. Simple solutions will not suffice. **Needed steps go well beyond body cameras and in-service training for police, and must address broader issues including adequate resources for public education, health and housing, stemming gun violence and increasing employment prospects.** Police residence in and reflection of the communities they serve, community-police partnerships, and recruitment of ethnic minorities and women into police departments are all vital ingredients for long-term success.

Important to highlight: (1) In New York State (and elsewhere) officials use elementary school test results to help predict future needs for prison cells; (2) The state’s inmate population is three-quarters African-American and Hispanic; (3) The state’s recidivism rate is currently 40 percent; (4) Gov. Cuomo estimated college courses in prison to cost about US\$5,000 a year versus \$60,000 a year to house each prisoner; (5) Programs that focus on education for prisoners sharply reduce likelihood of repeat criminality; and (6) Support for reintegration and employment is similarly important.

¹

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FUSA%2FCO%2F6&Lang=en paragraph 20.

²http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD/C/USA/7-9&Lang=en paragraph 68.

For African-American and Hispanic youth especially, it can be terribly important not to become entangled in a system that currently is less “protect and serve” and more “contain and control.” In an effort to help, the New York Chapter of Blacks in Law Enforcement of America has published a pamphlet entitled “[How do you survive police confrontation?](#)”

We pledge to do our part in the following ways:

- Wide circulation of this statement to the media, public officials and other organizations and individuals;
- Provision of our shadow report to those desiring copies;
- Sharing the report of the December 10, 2014, Human Rights Day event by the UNA Mid-Hudson Valley Chapter, on the subject “**Bringing human rights home: inequality, race and the United States,**” held at the FDR Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY.
- Convening, in early 2015, by the UNA Southern NY Young Professionals, a seminar to explore racism, police brutality, and UN oversight in America -- with a specific emphasis upon recent events;
- Presentation, in February 2015, of our work and that of UNA-USA on the UN Universal Periodic Review of human rights and our Division’s shadow report on racial discrimination and the American criminal justice system, at the UNA-USA Mid-Atlantic Conference and National Members Day that is to be held at the United Nations.

Much has yet to be done, at all levels of government, by civic organizations and by individuals to ensure justice and embody the founding principles of the U.S. and the UN.

ⁱ Co-sponsors of the July 2014 seminar -- Black Westchester Magazine, Blacks in Law Enforcement of America, The Correctional Association of New York, The Fortune Society, Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, Theodore D. Young Community Center, Town of Greenburgh, New York, Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office.

+++

The United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) is a membership organization dedicated to inform, inspire, and mobilize the American people to support the ideals and vital work of the United Nations. www.unausa.org

The UNA-USA Southern New York State Division includes a Young Professionals Group, chapters in Brooklyn, the Mid-Hudson Valley, New York City (Manhattan), Queens and Westchester, and work in the surrounding counties from Columbia to Suffolk.

The views in this article are those of the Board of the Southern New York State Division.

Contact:

Jeanne Betsock Stillman, President
UNA-USA Southern New York State Division
Tel: 914-478-3450 unasouthernny@gmail.com www.unasouthernny.org @UNASouthernny