

Updated Statement from IVAT on the Wrongful Death of Breonna Taylor

2 October 2020

Breonna Taylor, 26 years old, was shot and killed when three Louisville police officers raided her home under a no-knock warrant in the middle of the night. Breonna had committed no crime. She was not even a suspect of a crime. She was a victim. Several aspects of this situation where errors were made, some of which remain under investigation, are of concern with respect to the underlying conditions that led to this tragedy. Accountability for her death is needed as well as reforms so this type of situation does not occur again in any of our communities. A grand jury has indicted one of the three officers on charges of wanton endangerment, and no criminal charges have been filed against the other two officers at this point. Investigations as to all aspects of this situation are ongoing and more details are being released daily. We can all agree that Breonna Taylor's life should never have been tragically taken from her and her family!

We support the Taylor family and strongly urge that work on appropriate reforms begins immediately. A paradigm shift is needed to divert attention to the factors that too often perpetuate such violence and abusive practices against black and brown people and other oppressed groups. Violence is rampant, and not acceptable in the above situation nor against law enforcement officers, which is also occurring. We need to acknowledge the intersectionality of structural racism that affects law enforcement, health care, social services, and the judicial systems. We need leadership that acknowledges and addresses systemic change. We are dissatisfied with the current dialogue that creates a misperception about crime and "law and order," and shifts the focus away from racism, bias, and ending violence in our communities by or against police officers. We must reinforce the perspective that police officers are needed public servants and first responders, and not just focus on "enforcers of the law." Reforms are needed as well as open dialogues. Some of this is indeed occurring in our country in some communities now.

Use-of-force legislation and traditional policing have created distrust within many communities. Bias can lead to errors in judgement with fatal outcomes, disproportionately affecting people of color. Perceptions need to change in order to improve officer morale, community policing, and community confidence. Most police officers are also good people trying to do their jobs and they are not happy about what they see either. One part of the system change that is needed requires enhanced police officer training and community outreach, which may offset misunderstandings about culture, race, and behaviors by all

parties. That is part of what IVAT is doing to help.

Policymakers need to acknowledge the many roles of police officers . Police de-escalate situations, mediate and provide therapeutic support in the field, and are expected to make quick and accurate assessments, support victims, and protect the community in which they serve. These are difficult situations. We encourage training and guidelines that emphasize the professionalism of the field and encourage accountability and ethical standards that should go hand-in-hand with authority and power. Legislation can be enacted based upon evidence-based standards that reduce the use-of-deadly force. Community policing creates a value system that supports officers and the community in a collaborative manner while seeking to address the problems that can lead to crime prevention. It also works to weed out those who do have or promote racist ideology.

In response to the decision in the Breonna Taylor case, Kristina Roth, the senior program officer for Criminal Justice Programs at Amnesty International USA said: "We call on police to facilitate the right to peaceful protest in the wake of this news," and we support the call for individuals to protest peacefully, without acting violently towards the police. We agree with concerns that the state of emergency declared in Louisville in advance of the announcement of the grand jury's findings, led some community members to feel that property was valued more than life, a feeling that was compounded by the decision of the grand jury. Breonna Taylor should be alive today. Justice for Breonna is admitting this never should have happened in the first place and demanding change to the systems, not just to a few police officers, that continue to devalue, dehumanize, violate, brutalize, and take the lives of black and brown people in this country disproportionately.

Sincerely,



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