

International Groups Challenge Police Violence

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Categories: Police Brutality

As protests over the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black Americans catalyzed a nationwide reckoning on race last year, global human rights defenders turned renewed focus toward systemic racism and violence in U.S. policing. Groups and investigative bodies from the United Nations to Human Rights Watch to Amnesty International spoke out to condemn police brutality and bring international pressure to stop violations.

The UN Steps In

Numerous arms of the United Nations amplified concerns over excessive force and discrimination by American police in 2020. Experts from the UN Human Rights Council conducted an official visit to monitor U.S. protests and policing practices. They later issued a report denouncing incidents of police using tear gas, rubber bullets and violent riot control tactics against peaceful demonstrators. The experts urged demilitarizing the police and concrete accountability measures like suspending offending officers.

Other UN leaders including the High Commissioner for Human Rights made direct appeals to the U.S. government to address systemic racism and ensure accountability for police killings of African Americans like George Floyd. Echoing activists' calls, High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet demanded reparations for victims and marginalized communities.

Global Watchdogs Verify Violations

Several prominent international human rights groups contributed extensive firsthand reporting on

escalating police abuses across 2020's protest movement.

Human Rights Watch deployed over 100 crisis researchers across American cities to document attacks on protestors and journalists by police. Their reporting verified uses of excessive force as well as evidence tampering to conceal violations. HRW used their findings to lobby Congress to pass bold new federal restrictions on police tactics like chokeholds and no-knock raids.

Amnesty International took similar actions—interviewing over 100 people subjected to violent crackdowns by law enforcement at demonstrations. Their documentation provided international verification of accounts of police severely injuring peaceful protestors, intimidating journalists, and misusing “less lethal” munitions to provoke injuries.

Turning Words into Action

Global rights organizations moved beyond fact-finding to demand government action curtailing police violence nationally. Many called for implementing strict use-of-force rules, early warning systems to identify problem officers, robust transparency and oversight processes, and redirecting funding to alternative crisis responders.

The groups also assisted victims in seeking legal accountability in individual cases. When prosecutors failed to file criminal charges against Louisville officers involved in the killing of Breonna Taylor, Amnesty International helped elevate Taylor's family's calls for justice through an international letter-writing campaign to pressure officials.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch attorneys testified before Congress on the compounding vulnerabilities of police violence faced by Black women and girls. The high-profile testimony gave fuel to a federal bill named for Taylor aimed at banning no-knock warrants nationwide.

Sustaining the Global Spotlight

Even as 2020's protests faded from the headlines, global rights defenders kept police racial violence issues top of mind in international institutions. UN special rapporteurs continued monitoring troubling U.S. practices like police officers' widespread use of social media to celebrate brutality.

And groups like the UN Human Rights Council and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have kept American policing squarely under scrutiny through ongoing reporting cycles. With the moral authority of these global watchdogs turned forcefully toward reforming police violence,

pressure mounts for national leaders to translate words into human rights progress.