
Racism Casts 'Dark Shadow' over United States, Says UN Expert

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The official raised alarm over police brutality and impunity, mass incarceration, and racial bias in the U.S. criminal justice system.

The United States is struggling to adequately tackle structural racism and criminal justice issues, which is impacting the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, a United Nations human rights expert warned.

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"People have good reason to be angry and frustrated at the moment," said Maina Kiai, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in a statement Thursday.

Much of the focus of social movements such as Campaign Zero and Black Lives Matter has been the racial bias of police in the United States and the fact that people of color are placed behind bars at a much greater rate than whites for crimes they are statistically no more likely to commit, Kiai pointed out.

"And it is at times like these when robust promotion of assembly and association rights are needed most. These rights give people a peaceful avenue to speak out, engage in dialogue with their fellow citizens and authorities, air their grievances and hopefully settle them," he added.

According to U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, African-American males are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white males and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic males. Indeed, though they make up less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, nearly 40 percent of the United States' 2.3 million prisoners are African-Americans.

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a structure that systematically devalues and destroys them, stretching back hundreds of years."

"There is justifiable and palpable anger in the Black community over these injustices. It needs to be expressed. This is the context that gave birth to the non-violent Black Lives Matter protest movement and the context in which it must be understood," Kiai stated.

According to a Pew Research survey carried out in August 2014, 7 in 10 Black people in the U.S. say police departments do a poor job of holding officers accountable for misconduct and racial bias.

That perception is supported by evidence. Investigative news website ProPublica looked at fatal police shootings of teenagers aged 15 to 19 between the years 2010 and 2012 and found that Black teens were killed at a rate of 31.17 per million, compared to 1.47 per million among white teens.

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