

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



“O You who have believed! Be persistently standing firm for justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, or parents and relatives - Whether one is rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [justice] or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all you do.”

- Surah Nisa, Verse 135

On behalf of the Black Muslim Initiative, we would like to express our deepest condolences to the Black families that have lost loved ones to white supremacy and police brutality over the last few weeks. Like many of you, we have been seeing disturbing and harrowing images from the United States that are deeply painful to watch. In the last few weeks alone, we have seen and heard about the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery as a result of both a system of policing and racial impunity that sees Black life as fundamentally less worthy and disposable. We pray to Allah that out of this darkness we can find light and justice for these Black lives and their families.

In our own local communities here in Canada, we are not immune to the senseless loss and perpetuation of excessive use of force against Black life. Anti-Black racism and anti-Black policing is nothing new here either. Indeed, a recent interim report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission focused on the Toronto Police and use of force between 2000-2006 and 2013-2017 found that despite comprising only 8.8% of the Toronto population, Black people were twenty times more likely to die in police shootings than their white counterparts. Black people made up 36% of all incidents of police shootings, 61% of use of force cases involving civilian death and an outrageous 70% of all fatal police shootings, despite being 50% less likely to be armed than whites. Black bodies constituted 25% of all Special Investigative Unit (SIU) investigations and were complainants in 28% of all SIU investigations during this period. And Black men -- despite being only 4.1% of Toronto's population -- were complainants in 25% of all SIU investigations alleging sexual assault by the Toronto Police. Suffice to say, Black people have good reason for not trusting those who have been entrusted with protecting us.

The recent death of Regis Korchinski-Paque, a Black-Indigenous woman in Toronto, whose family contacted police to solicit assistance for a case of mental distress -- only to find her dead shortly after -- is a stark reminder that the issue of police brutality against Black communities is not unique to the United States. There are now serious questions about the events that led to Regis's death and her family members and other eye-witnesses have stated that police on the scene were acting to cover up more sinister and negligent behavior. Like many others, we will continue to follow developments of this

tragic event as it raises harsh reminders of other fatal encounters of Black Canadians living with mental health challenges who've dealt with police.

Our communities are hurting. We are angry and enraged at having to witness a modern-day public lynching of a man desperately pleading for his life whilst officers look on as accessories and participants to murder. As Black Muslims in Canada, we are committed to fighting anti-black racism both within and outside of the Muslim community and in all its forms.

If you are a non-Black Muslim we encourage you to first and foremost reflect on how you and those you are close to overtly and subtly uphold the ideas of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. How are Black Muslims treated within your masjids? How are the contributions of Black Muslims taught in our madrassas and Islamic schools? Did the Imam who gave the khutba at Jumma prayer last Friday talk about the loss of Black lives as an affront to justice in the name of Islam? Do our leaders make obeying the authorities a priority over efforts to stand for justice and demand action? Is Bilal the only Black person you know in Islamic history? Is the refrain, "there is no racism in Islam", the only thing that you can think of doing or saying when you hear Black Muslims tell you about their experiences of racism? Do you automatically assume that the Black person that was killed didn't comply with police orders? Do you believe that he could have avoided being targeted if only he dressed better and spoke proper English? Do you know anything about the history of Black people in the Americas and the enduring struggle they've been fighting against white supremacy for full recognition and equality? And do you know anything about the racism and subjugation Black Muslims and Black people have faced throughout Islamic history and within modern predominantly-Muslim countries?

In the weeks and months ahead, the Black Muslim Initiative will first and foremost, inshaAllah, be working to create space and empower members of the Black Muslim community. We will be working with organisations and individuals to provide Black Muslims with resources and skills to navigate risk and oppressive environments. We will be supporting the work of other Black-Muslim organisations and groups here in Canada and in the US. We will be working towards sharing information about Black-focused organisations that have been in the trenches and that have real and actionable strategies to help support their communities. We will also be working within our broader Muslim community groups and organisations to support and develop resources to help counter anti-Black racism .

We encourage everyone to get involved, educate yourself and those around them, contact your local representatives, donate, attend a rally or vigil, sign a petition and/or take action. If you can change something with your hand, then do it. If you can change things with your voice, then do it. And if you can't do either of those, then work to change whatever exists within yourself that is unbothered by the images you're seeing.

In Peace and Justice,

Black Muslim Initiative

www.blackmusliminitiative.ca