

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

March 25, 2012

Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General of the United States
Office of the Attorney General
The United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-001

Attorney General Pam Bondi
Florida Office of the Attorney General
State of Florida
The Capitol PL-01
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Dear Attorneys General Holder and Bondi:

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) joins other human rights groups in calling for further investigation into the death of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012. George Zimmerman, the man who admits to killing Trayvon, remains free almost one month later. We believe the death of Trayvon has not been thoroughly investigated, denying Trayvon's family, the community of Sanford and indeed our entire society a sense of true justice.

As an organization of psychologists and other mental health professionals we are concerned about the loss Trayvon's family and community are enduring and the ways in which the justice system is failing them. We believe the death of Trayvon and the reactions of the Sanford Police Department to this killing have broad psychosocial impacts because they exemplify the terror and trauma that racism inflicts on many Americans today.

According to the FBI, the single largest motivator (nearly 50%) of hate crimes in the United States is racial bias, with anti-black bias accounting for 70% of those offenses (<http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2010-hate-crime-statistics>). On the 911 calls from February 26, 2012 we hear Zimmerman criminalizing Trayvon as a "black" man. These recordings reveal how racism may have played a role in Zimmerman's later actions, motivating Zimmerman to use deadly force despite orders from the 911 police to stand down.

The Sanford police have so far failed to arrest Zimmerman, who claims he shot Trayvon in self-defense, despite evidence in the public domain that Zimmerman pursued Trayvon. The media also reports that other African American crime victims have felt betrayed by the Sanford police, who have been slow to press criminal charges in the past when victims are people of color. It is no wonder that public outrage includes the accusation that racism has been normalized and institutionalized in the Sanford Police Department.

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The combined effects of this tragic killing and the failure of the justice system to act swiftly allows for questions regarding the permissibility of violence in our culture. The permission to stalk another human and kill that person because of “suspicions” based, at least in part, on the person’s race leaves a chilling effect on those of us who are concerned with human rights for all. Anthony Marsella, past director of the World Health Organization Psychiatric Research Center and past president of PsySR, says, “If there is any meaning to come from the killing of yet one more Black man, one more repetition of a killing that has crossed centuries and place, let it be that this evil is confronted in all its forms across our land.” It is time for national dialog on the lingering persistence of racism.

We urge you to ensure a thorough investigation into the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman. At this point in time, we remain unconvinced that justice has been served, that Trayvon’s death was in any way justified, and that racism was not a factor in Trayvon’s death.

Sincerely,

The Steering Committee of Psychologists for Social Responsibility