

List of Issues Tabled by Members of the
Ottawa Somali Community Meeting with Chief Bordeleau

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

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1. Background and Introduction

Following your initial invitation to some members of the Ottawa Somali community, a cross-section representation of the community met to have candid and reflective discussions concerning the issues surrounding the death of Abdirahman Abdi.

Following the tragic death of Abdirahman Abdi, the Somali community met to mourn and grieve the loss of a fellow community member. Members of the community were deeply troubled by possibility that such a death could occur. As such, many in attendance that evening reconvened to form a group dedicated to seeking Justice for Abdirahman and ensure that such incidents never repeat themselves again, thus the Justice for Abdirahman campaign was formed.

While the circumstances concerning the need for this meeting are unfortunate, the opportunity exists to make real and meaningful change. The following is a set of issues and related recommendations concerning the current state affairs between the OPS and the Somali community. These issues are not exhaustive and do not necessarily reflect the views of the entire community, but rather a cross-section of representatives and leaders within the community.

Should the need arise, members of this group would be pleased to meet with you and convene in the near future for further discussions and to elaborate on the recommendations presented. It is our hopes that this will occur, provided the basis for a collaborative approach to improving the current situation and create better circumstances for continued engagement.

2. Requested Timeline for Response

We request that you review these issues and consider the recommendations detailed herein. Please provide a written response to each of these stated issues and recommendations and present them in a follow up meeting with this group within 30 days of this meeting.

3. Officers Under Investigation

Issue: Lack of Reprimand for Officers Under Investigation

Two of your officers were implicated in the incident of July 24th involving the death of Abdirahman Abdi. It is a grave disservice to the community to have these officers still serving on the streets.

Recommendation:

Commit to the temporary reassignment of police officers who are under investigation for causing death or serious injury to administrative duty, and prohibiting any form of interfacing with community members until the investigation is complete.

4. Relationship between OPS and Racialized Communities (Somali community in particular)

Issue: Acknowledgement

Recent statistics indicate (Ottawa blacks are 5.7% of population but account for approximately 20% of street checks.¹) that there is a crisis within the Ottawa Police Services when it comes to how authorities interact with members of racialized communities and citizens suffering from mental health issues. In the face of such incidents, it goes a long way to acknowledge a problem of this magnitude and is a meaningful first step to mending a fractured relationship.

Recommendation:

The Chief, as the leader of the OPS should make a public acknowledgement that there is a crisis within the OPS and authority's interactions with members of racialized communities and citizens suffering from mental health issues publicly and internally.

Issue: Community Ties

Acknowledging that the OPS has worked long and hard to build ties and a strong foundation with the Somali community, we note that this foundation is fractured. The relationship between the Somali community and OPS Administration will bear no fruit if there remains tension, fear and mistrust (particularly between our youth and police).

Recommendation:

The OPS should avoid tokenism in its outreach efforts and apply more meaningful consultation methods with the Somali community.

Issue: Expansion of Dialogue

The incident of July 24th have sparked great interest in many citizens of Ottawa regarding community policing and has open dialogue between and across various stakeholders. An

¹ Yogaretnam, Shaamini. Ottawa Citizen. "Street Check Race Data 'cries Out' for an Explanation: Lawyer." July 27, 2015. Accessed August 30, 2016. <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/street-check-race-data-cries-out-for-an-explanation-lawyer>.

opportunity exists for the OPS to broaden its engagement on race relations and mental health issues with the wider community.

Recommendations:

The OPS should commit to meetings in the near future as appropriate with interested stakeholders namely; The Justice for Abdirahman Coalition, organizations representing Ottawa's Black communities and mental health advocacy groups. It is recommended that an open door policy remain for all those interested in engaging the OPS in these matters.

5. Profiling

Issues: Lack of race based data collection perpetuation of degrading images and narratives

According to recent public data², from 2011 to 2014, black and visible minority communities accounted for over 34% of street checks. This data, in addition to further anecdotal evidence reported by community members, clearly indicates that bias exists.

Recommendation:

The OPS should commit to the ongoing collection and publication of race-based data for all police interactions. Moreover, as a means to oppose the perpetuation of degrading images/narratives of racialized communities. The OPS should avoid:

- *associating crime with the ethnic origin of the individual suspect;*
- *sensationalizing arrests;*
- *leaking unnecessary police history of deceased individuals to the media.*

6. Body Cameras

Issue: Compromising Transparency

Body cameras are essential, they act as a means to ensure both the safety and accountability of all parties. Budgetary restrictions have lead the OPS to reprioritize, resulting in the desertion of this initiative.

² Yogaretnam, Shaamini. "Street Checks Data about Racialized Men concerning to Civil Liberties Advocates." Ottawa Citizen. July 26, 2015. Accessed August 30, 2016. <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/street-checks-data-about-racialized-men-concerning-to-civil-liberties-advocates>.

Recommendation:

The OPS should commit to a pilot program, targeting a specific community to be determined. That pilot program, in conjunction with comprehensive data collection, will serve as a precursor to a wider body-cam program when fiscally feasible. This localized pilot program will also prove significantly more affordably than an immediate move to a city wide body-cam initiative.

7. Community Oversight

Issue: Lack of Feedback Mechanisms and Oversight

While the initial intent of COMPAC was valuable, its effectiveness and legitimacy has diminished over the years. In this absence, there is an expressed lack of a continuous, formal and effective feedback mechanism in place for racialized communities, specifically, for the Somali community. As per the statistical race based data discussed herein, it is evident that racialized communities are targeted at a disproportionate rate in street checks. More specifically, Somali-Canadians experience a homicide rate comparable to the Aboriginal community despite only making up 0.04 % of the general population. The attached study published in April 2016 demonstrates a more alarming pattern of Ottawa Somali-homicide rates nearly doubling in since 2015. Developing measures to combat these statistics are in the best interest the OPS and the Somali community's shared interest in creating a healthy and constructive relationship.

Recommendation:

The OPS should dismantle COMPAC and explore a more effective feedback mechanism that allows on-going opportunity for the community to provide feedback and oversight of initiatives that effect racialized community in general and the Somali community in particular. Regarding the Somali community, quarterly meetings with stakeholders would be an excellent means to assess the community's satisfaction with relevant policing initiatives.

8. Human Resources and Operations

Issue: Training & Procedures

The events of July 24th, as well as the issues and supporting data herein point to the need for revamped training for the OPS on anti-racism. More specifically, when race is intersected with issues of mental health, language barriers, and other potential vulnerabilities.

Recommendation:

The OPS should review and revamp its de-escalation training take into account race, mental health, language barriers, and other potential vulnerabilities.

Issue: Hiring and Human Resources Process

A simple statistical analysis of the police force shows that it is not reflective of the diverse community it serves. In the last several years, there are many qualified Somali-Canadian candidates who have applied for positions within the OPS only to be rejected. The continued difficult qualified candidates experience indicates that systemic barriers exist. Furthermore, the systemic barriers within the organization creates difficulties for internal candidates to find advancement opportunities.

Recommendation:

The OPS should conduct an audit of its current hiring process and remove systemic barriers to ensure the OPS is reflective of the diverse community it serves. In addition, the OPS should commit to disclosing reasons for rejection of job applications to prospective candidates and archive data on hiring, particularly with respect to the Somali community.

9. Gang Associate Database and Specialized Policing (Guns and Gangs)

Issue: Excessive Force

Young Somali men in our communities have repeatedly shared incidents regarding the use of excessive force and profiling by the Guns and Gangs Unit and accompanying neighborhood officers. While police tactics are expected in cases of gang related crime, an overwhelming number of reported incidents by youth in our community expressed an abuse of these tactics.

Recommendation:

The OPS should conduct a public review of the Guns and Gangs Unit's gang suppression strategy and provide opportunity for community resource leaders and experts in youth criminal behavior to offer input on developing updated strategies and protocols.

Issue: Handling of the Gang Associate Database

The current process for identifying and adding individuals as associates in the Gang Associate Database is in need of review. A key problem lies in the broad and ambiguous definition of a “gang associate”. In the event that an individual is mistakenly labeled as a gang associate, there is no means for recourse and thus creates a continuous negative loop for the individual as such labels carry heavy stigma.

Recommendation:

The OPS should clearly define “gang associate” and create mechanisms for youth wrongly identified as gang associates be removed from that database. As for those youth who have disengaged from criminal activity, the OPS should provide reform opportunities and means to remove their names from the database.

Appendix: Somali Canadian Community's Homicide Rates

Here are some interesting facts.

"In total, Canadian police services reported 516 homicides in 2014. Of that, 117 people -- or 23 per cent -- were reported by police as aboriginal." Despite only being 1% of the population (1.4 million) Canada's being 35.6 million"³

Here's a comparison between the general Canadian, Aboriginal and Somali-Canadian homicide rate.

The Somali population is 120,000-150,000(0.04%)

In 2014:

For a normal Canadian 516 Homicides divided by 35.6 million times 100,000 equals=1.45 homicide rate

For an Aboriginal Canadian 117 divided by 1.4 million times 100,000 equals= 8.35 homicide rate

For a Somali-Canadian (Based of either a pop. of 120,000 or 150,000) 9 Divided by 120,000 or 150,000 times 100,000 equals between 7.5 and 9 (With this figure increasing in 2015)

Aboriginal Canadians 6 times as likely to be a victim of homicide. Somali-Canadians also are around this figure based off these stats {between 5-7}.

³ CTV News. Homicide rate 6 times higher for aboriginal Canadians: StatsCan. November 25, 2015.
<http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/homicide-rate-6-times-higher-for-aboriginal-canadians-statscan-1.2673751>