

Hearing with the Helsinki commission on: Human Rights at Home : Implications for U.S. leadership
Malcolm Momodou Jallow

A few words to introduce myself – I am a member of the Swedish parliament and of the Swedish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. the main human rights organisation of this continent. In this capacity, I have the opportunity to exchange regularly with parliamentarians from 47 European countries.

Political developments in the US have a significant socio-economic and political impact on the rest of the world. There is reason for great concern about the unfolding grave human rights crisis in the United States: partly as a result of the systemic brutal police killings of black people, but also the use of state sanctioned excessive force and suppression of peaceful protesters. These are clear violations of United States obligations under international law.

The Trump administration has within this short period of time completely eroded the authority of the US as a standard bearer and thereby undermined the legitimacy of the so-called **U.S. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP**. One cannot exercise effective soft power without legitimacy. The isolationist foreign policy direction, the nationalist rhetoric and the blatant non-compliance to the international human rights standards and rules-based orders only accelerate the decline in confidence from the rest of the world.

We have had a series of evidence of structural and institutional racism and racist policing fuelled by historical abuses and negative stereotyping, leading to the exclusion and dehumanisation of black people in the U.S. However, this particular murder of George Floyd has become a clear manifestation and a tipping point for what many, including many Europeans, perceive as state sanctioned racism and blatant violation of the civil and human rights of black people.

What we have seen in the U.S. does not only illustrate the deep rooted and historical systemic injustice against black people. It also clearly manifests the extent to which white supremacy ideologies are normalised.

What we are seeing is a manifestation of a democracy in crisis.

If this were happening in any other part of the world, the U.S. and other western countries would be demanding a regime change.

It is remarkable, however, how much time it took and how much pressure from the black community that was required for the global leadership to react.

When leaders sow the seeds of hatred and stoke the flames of racist violence, we legitimize intolerance and bigotry.

We create division rather than unite the people.

And most importantly, we undermine the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Structural, institutional and systemic racism, including racist violence, is not confined only to the boundaries of the U.S. It is also very much present in Europe. We have, and continue to experience, our share of structural and institutional racism and police brutality. With impunity.

Over the last decade, we have seen an increase, both in gravity and number, in the manifestations of racism in all its forms.

I woke up yestersy morning reading on my time Line an article from New York Times with the title:

A young Black man (Phillip Mbuji Johansen, 28 years old) was tortured and killed on a remote island in Denmark by two white men with known far-right affiliations, one of them with a swastika tattoo on his leg, but the authorities are refusing to call it a hate crime.”

Mr. Johansen’s mutilated body was found at a camp site. According to the preliminary indictment, his skull was broken after he was beaten several times with a wooden beam; he was stabbed multiple times; a knife was driven through his throat and a knee had been planted in his neck. He died sometime early Tuesday, according to a forensic report.

The prosecutor, Benthe Pedersen Lund, told a local newspaper that the killing had nothing to do with “skin color” but with “a personal relationship that has gone wrong.”

Woury Jallow in Germany, Adama Traore, in France, Steven Lawrence UK and now Phillip Mbuju are just a few amongst a long list of victims of racist violence that lead to the loss of their lives. All of these cases were systematically met with blatant denial of the root causes that lead to the tragic consequences for these victims.

The effects of governments’ failure to devise and implement adequate policies on social cohesion, diversity, migration and social inclusion have triggered this upsurge, which has been amplified by the increasing use of Internet and social media. The dimension, gravity and frequency of their manifestations are of great concern and urgency.

The urgency becomes even more acute, considering that these phenomena have repercussions that go well beyond the single individuals that are directly targeted.

They affect entire communities and they create divides in society, affecting human rights and social cohesion; and they erode even further the trust in public authorities, the rule of law and ultimately democracy.

In addition, issues of race relations deeply affect the conduct of our foreign policy relations

The European project has anti-discrimination at its heart, with a fundamental commitment to ensuring that we learn the lessons of the Holocaust and past European divisions through pursuit of human rights for all. This project, however, appears to be failing with regard to Black Europeans. The pain and denigration of Black people has a historical context that we must remember., Hence, the UN Decade on People of African Descent and its three focus areas Recognition, Justice and Development.

The images of the brutal and tragic death of George Floyd triggered a protest movement not only in the U.S. but around the world. The scale and intensity of the protests illustrates a deep sense of frustration and pain that Europe, for the longest of time, had shown no regard for.

The usual silence and exceptional entitlements from European leaders are no more working, as **this is not a moment, but a movement.** A movement that is deeply and permanently committed to justice, human rights and the rule of law. Not in words, but in action!

“ I want people across the world and the leaders in the United Nations to see the video of my brother George Floyd, to listen to his cry for help, and I want them to answer his cry,” said Philonise Floyd, brother of George Floyd. “I appeal to the United Nations to help him. Help me. Help us. Help Black men and women in America.”

There is a George Floyd in every part of Europe, and just like George Floyd , we can’t breathe. It is time for the European leadership, as well as the U.S. leadership, to recognise their blind spots and listen to our demands for justice, equality and human rights.

You got a chance and a you got choice, so we demand to see changes. We must act quickly, firmly and collectively, because when we choose to be silent in the face of hatred, bigotry and racism, we choose to be complacent there by undermining the fundamental values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.