

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“8:46 (GEORGE FLOYD): A Time for Transformation at Home and
Abroad”**

Committee Staff Present:

**Alex T. Johnson, Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in
Europe**

Participants:

**Abena Oppong-Asare, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom;
Adam Hollier, Michigan State Senator;
Mitchell Esajas, Chair, New Urban Collective (Netherlands);
Karen Taylor, Chair, European Network Against Racism (ENAR)**

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Alex T. Johnson, Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in
Europe, presiding**

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JOHNSON: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much and good afternoon to our colleague from Europe calling it. Thank you so much for joining us at this timely briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission. A reminder to our colleagues and participants, this briefing is on the record and being recorded at this time.

Earlier this week we heard the impassioned plea of Philonise Floyd, brother of George Floyd, as he testified before the House Judiciary Committee, braving the COVID-19 pandemic to come to Washington and give voice to the racist brutality of his brother's death. As the world watched in full color, thousands took to the streets in America and abroad to recognize that violence of his murder is a symptom of broader systemic racism and unresolved community trauma that is not America's alone.

His death has prompted global review of the use of force, like in the 2016 death of Adama Traore in France under similar circumstances, and countless others. As we reflect on the needs to address systemic racism in the United States and globally, this briefing invites the perspectives of practitioners and political leaders with a long record of service addressing these issues.

Let me be the first to offer our role in convening this conversation. My name is Alex Johnson. I'm the chief of staff of the Helsinki Commission, which was established in 1976 to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. And subsequent commitments stemming from what is now the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or the OSCE. In so doing, we reflect on the numerous international commitments that America has agreed to under the auspices of the OSCE, and how we can work with other OSCE participating states to live by those commitments.

In the instance of combatting racism, commitments go all the way back to the Helsinki Final Act, including principal seven which states, "The participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. This principle comes from a document from 1975. And I think we've seen that we have a long way to go in addressing some of these principles.

To make these commitments part of our lives, leadership matters. In the 110th Congress in 2007 Representative Alcee Hastings became the first African American to chair the commission, following his leadership as the first and only American president of the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly. In the 110th Congress and to this day Chairman Hastings advanced a number of priorities related to advancing safe, inclusive, and equitable societies, including paving the way for further OSCE Ministerial Council decisions to implement the values of equality enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

His leadership helped catalyze a black European summit in Brussels in 2009, numerous convenings of the Transatlantic Minority Political Leadership Conference, delegation exchanges, as well as hearings and briefings on community reconciliation against hate in all its forms. One

highlight has been the establishment of a partnership with the State Department and the German Marshall Fund of the United States to form the Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network, which has brought more than 200 emerging political leaders together to advanced systemic change that overcomes hate. Most of our panelists today are actually alumni of this program.

To reflect on my own journey, a struggle shared with our panelists in the spaces where they resiliently lead, the Commission is pivotal starting point. I was honored in 2007 to join the cohort of the first African American permanent staff at the Helsinki Commission since its establishment in 1976. Last year I came back as its first black chief of staff.

I'll be the first to say that seeking to lead from an underrepresented community in national security and foreign policy has had its own challenges in the context of systemic racism – whether being called un-American for demanding racial and gender equity in public programming, or leading meetings with officials who never expected me to be their interlocutor, the emotional toll can be mounting, especially as racial violence rages in the streets and presumptive attacks on black citizenship can come even while watching birds in the park. We know that racism must end now.

As visceral a period as this has been for many, it has illuminated that ending racism as a domestic and global problem requires drawing experiences from the field. From the solidarity demonstrations seen in many capitals, to the political action of our partners in Europe also grappling with the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, our panelists will help the United States move toward actionable solutions to preserve democracy and meet our international commitments.

You will find full bios of our panelists in the digital context package for this briefing on the webpage for this briefing. First, we will hear from Abena Oppong-Asare, a member of the United Kingdom Parliament representing Erith an Thamesmead, also serves as parliamentary private sector for the shadow chancellor of the exchequer, helping shape the Labour Party's economic policies. Before Parliament, Ms. Oppong-Asare worked with London Mayor Sadiq Khan to address the response to the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy, which illuminated inequities in public services. She has chaired the Labour Women's Network, advancing email political representation, and is among the first black women of Ghanaian descent to be elected to the U.K. Parliament.

We're so honored that you took the time to join us, to call in from your busy schedule in London. And at this time we offer the floor to you. Thank you so much. Please unmute your microphone. Thank you.

OPPONG-ASARE: Oh, have I unmuted? Oops. Sorry. Sorry about that.

JOHNSON: It's ready to go. Thank you so much for joining us.

OPPONG-ASARE: Am I on? Am I still muted?

JOHNSON: You're on now. You're online. But now your microphone is muted.
(Laughter.)

OPPONG-ASARE: What is going on?

JOHNSON: There we go. You're live now. Thank you.

OPPONG-ASARE: OK. I just wanted to thank the Helsinki Commission for organizing this. I think this is a really important discussion to have. And what we've seen in America is quite similar to the U.K. in terms of the racial justice that we're trying to find here. I think no one can actually be at home and not be affected by what happened to George Floyd. I think we're in a really sad situation that it has taken someone being killed by the police before a lot of action or recognition has been taken, particularly in terms of inequality that happens to black individuals. I know a lot of us have been kind of fighting for that for quite a number of years.

But before I proceed, I just wanted, as well as talking about recognizing George Floyd, but I also want to offer my deepest condolences to Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade, who also died – who were also murdered by the police. I have to say that I'm very much in support of these Black Lives Matter movements that are happening across the U.S. and the U.K. I put out a statement after George Floyd was murdered and I publicly said that I supported these movements. And I highlighted that it's not just a U.S. issue. It's an issue that happens in the U.K. And that this situation is not new.

And the reason that I did that was I felt that there was a lot of reaction from people disgusted this was happening in America saying: How could this happen? We don't have these issues in the U.K. When actually, there are issues – I face barriers myself. And I know many other people who have faced barriers.

What we have seen is we've seen things such as protests that have happened. And it seemed to very much a younger crowd that is going out and being very cool. And it's interesting, I don't know if you caught it in the U.S., but there was a statute that was of a slaveowner, Colston, who was essentially removed by protesters. And since then what we've seen in London, particularly with the mayor of London Sadiq Khan, he contacted all the labor councils in London asking them to identify statues that are of slaveowners. And just a few days ago, we saw them remove – one of the councils remove a statue.

It's sad that it's taken such a movement for people to recognize that these statues need to go. Sadiq Khan has even gone further, where he's actually set up a commission and he's looking at also – and I've flagged it up with him – roads that are named after slave masters. There are buildings as well. But for me, I think all this solidarity is good. You know, I've done – taken a kneed, and stuff like that. But we need to move beyond these kind of symbols. I've been very clear that action needs to take place.

So the situation with COVID is very similar to what you're happening in the U.S., where we've seen how it's impacted ethnic minorities more than their white counterparts. I have dealt personally, as a representative, with cases of individuals that have lost their loved ones. I have

lost people close to me that have died from COVID as well. And to me, we've recently had a review that's been published by the president. And what was particularly concerning about that was there was no recommendations that was given in terms of how to counter and address this. And this is something that me and my team have been doing some work over the – since April, looking at how we can basically address these issues. Because the government is looking to ease lockdown. And if we're seeing that the stats are that it impacts ethnic minorities the highest, we need to make sure that we safeguard those individuals. And it's conversations that I've been having with people on that.

Police brutality, you know, in the U.K. if you're black you are 40 more times more than likely to be stopped and search by the police, in England and Wales. Police have basically – black people have experienced 4 percent use of force since 2017, '18. And that's just despite the fact that in the U.K. only 3.3 percent – I say, 3.3 percent of the population are people from a black background. So those figures are really, really high. So stop and search isn't new. It's an issue that has occurred in the U.K. for such a long time. But what we have seen during COVID is the stop and search numbers have increased substantially. And we are seeing videos surface online where people have been stopped by the police and have been – and the PP – and the news has been not fortunate.

And it was one of the concerns that I had when the government brought in these new COVID powers, policing powers. And I made representations in April, two months ago. And this is before the whole – the protests happen, where I said that I am concerned about the impact of these COVID policing powers, and how it disproportionately affects people from ethnic minority backgrounds. And I'd ask basically if we could have clearer data in terms of inequality impact assessment to be completed. Looking at weekly – a breakdown of the weekly arrests and cautions. I still haven't received that information, but it's something that I am championing in Parliament.

Going forward from this, I think that post-COVID we are going to see a very different kind of society. And I think that this is an opportunity to make sure that legislation in the U.K. in particular is shaped in a way that is representative of everybody, and that no one is being left behind. I am seeing lots of new activists on the ground. And I think this is an opportunity to actually make positive change. I am really concerned this weekend because we are hearing that there are more protests to take place, but also the far-right are also looking to come out and cause trouble this weekend. So I am publicly urging constituents of mine to be really, really careful, and to actually just make sure that they practice social distancing, because we cannot allow this positive movement to turn into something really negative.

Things that I think that need to change is we need to look at our policing practices. We need to be listening to people on the ground. And I feel very strongly, and this is something that I'm looking at it, is we need to look at how we can offer training and make sure that people are basically given the support on the ground, and actually looking in all our workplaces and making sure that, you know, we improve the diversity and look up discrimination in the workplace.

I'm just going to – because I know I'm running out of time – I think what I like about what has happened in the U.S. is yesterday recently I saw that IBM and Amazon removed their

facial recognition. And we have facial recognition in the police force and I basically asked for this to be looked into, to see if this is something that we can stop doing because I feel very strongly that it disproportionately discriminates those that are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

One thing that I am trying to do, particularly in the political level, and though I am one of the six black women in my party, is I'm trying to improve representation of ethnic minorities. This is an opportunity to turn anger or frustration into action. And anyway we do that is if we try to get more people into those positions of power to help change that narrative, because it's so important that we're at the top table. But also, it shouldn't be left to ethnic minorities raising concerns about inequality. We need our white allies to do that. And I've been contacted by a number of my colleagues who have asked me in terms of how they should approach this, what they need to do differently, which is really good. But it's just about making sure that we continue.

But I'm going to stop now because I know that there are other speakers. And I can answer questions a bit later.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much for your contribution. I think it was important that you raised the point of moving beyond symbols for what action needs to be taken right now. And in particular, raising the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities. We should definitely follow up in terms of the issues you raised related to making public service reflect the constituencies that they serve. And we commend your work on those issues.

Now we will hear from state senator Adam Hollier from Detroit, Michigan, who has courageously called on those impacted by racism to share the stories of their racially charged encounters with law enforcement under the campaign of #WhenIBecameAThreat. He served his community as a volunteer firefighter and in the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant, where he is now a reservist. After a career working with local officials in Detroit, he was elected to the Michigan State Senate in 2018, representing District 2.

Senator Hollier, thank you so much for making the time to join us. We look forward to your perspective and thoughts on the U.S. context of current demonstrations and political action, as well as what solutions you're exploring in your community. Thank you. The floor is yours.

HOLLIER: Thanks, Alex.

First, let me, you know, say thank you for the opportunity to speak here and to do this. One of the things that I think is most important and most missing in our community is having a seat at the table and being able to share your voice. And so it's something that I think is critically important for us to be thinking about and doing right now. And so I kind of just want to start with kind of the history of policing. I think everyone is thinking about how do we address policing, and what do we do, and where does it go from here?

And I think it's important to recognize that context of policing, particularly in the United States, and its interaction with the black community comes very much so out of a southern institution designed to oppress black people in a post-Jim Crow, you know, era, and

understanding that the small items and the unreasonable rules were assigned and created in a manner to further subjugate individuals, right? So – and that that continues to permeate and be perpetuated in our community from programs like Stop and Frisk to, you know, the member of Parliament right before me talking about the use of facial recognition which, you know, at least in America and so many spaces we know, is disproportionately poor at recognizing the differences between black people, particularly black women.

And we talk about these kind of tools and think about this kind of space, we recognize that many of these things were designed not to support us, or to protect us, but to protect us from other individuals. Which is why it was so important for me to share the idea of #WhenIBecameAThreat, as I started to have these conversations with my friends and colleagues, who recognized and came to that same feeling that we had many of these opportunities and experiences where we recognized that police officers were not there to protect us, but to protect other people from us.

And that is a unique and I think strange experience, when you want the police to be there for you – and the context that we're starting to see around police brutality, and reform, and change. You see places that are very successful, right? So the city of Detroit has had peaceful protests every day for, you know, almost two weeks now. And that's because we had a mayor, Coleman Young, who as soon as he got elected changed the way police was done. That we have robust civilian oversight in our government. That we have a more diverse police force that you see in some other places. And it made a real impact when you talk about the level of community policing.

But that was only made possible because of years of reform. We've had our share of riots, and rebellions, and insurrections, and pushbacks against systems that were very much so not legitimate. And because we've come out of those things we are in a better position today. Much of that changed also required federal oversight. So the city of Detroit's police department was under federal oversight for many years, and coming out of that was able to make a log of the changes around policing, community engagement, that you start to see when you hear people talking about defunding the police and shifting not only how we fund police officers, but where those dollars go in enhanced training, in more robust community mental health agencies, doing mental health reports, which you've seen a rise of in the city of Detroit.

But it hasn't made enough of an impact because every day we still have to learn the name of someone else, right? And I think that's important because in many ways the civil rights – the legacy of civil rights in this country has been based on names, right? It's been individuals who remember through time, who made an incredible impact. And some of them it is because they were great organizers, or elected officials. Some of them because they ended tragically, right?

So you look at Emmett Till, and though people do not remember his mother, his mother made a tremendous and courageous decision to show the mutilation of her son. And TV and times made that a very different experience, right? Like, those photos and that visceral reaction allowed people to engage with that understanding of that woman who lost her son, and also that the person who killed him was found innocent. You know, said they did it, was not found guilty by a court of what he would say is his peers, in the all landed white men. And when you saw

what happened with Michael (sic; George) Floyd, we think, oh man, maybe this will be the change. But is it the video? Is it that that makes a difference? Or is just that people have now been so frustrated with all this change that we're ready for change?

And so I've been grappling very much so with is George Floyd Emmett Till? You know, what is the racial context and the societal context that says – we think about these in very gendered terms, right? So when we think about people who have been killed by police violence, it's often a black man's perspective, right? So you remember Tamir Rice. You remember Michael Brown. And we talk about Trayvon Martin. But we don't often say enough about Sandra Bland. We don't talk about Breonna Taylor in the same context. There is a black woman who was found dead in police custody in my district just this week. And we're grappling with how do you address these issues in the context of today?

And it's extremely difficult, particularly noting as we try and grapple with the symbols of oppression that have existed in our past, you know, I'm a commissioned military officer. And I'm often, you know, sent to bases that are named after Confederate generals. And people would say, oh, it's just – you know, we can't rewrite history. And no one is asking us to rewrite history. We're asking history to be told effectively. We're asking it to be told and that it be honored in the context of how we have to live. And so it does not make sense for us to have to live in these systems that are constantly saying that we are less than, that we are not enforced, that we are not supported. And that's what having a military installation named after Robert E. Lee, a, you know, traitor to the U.S., says. That's what it says when you have one named after Benning, or any of those kind of things.

In the same context, the city of Detroit renamed what was formerly Cobo Hall because he was fairly racist, right? And so I think as we look forward into the future there are the gestures that say: You are welcome, and you are being invited into a safe space. But I think we have to transition into saying we're going to invest in real change. Right, so COVID-19 disproportionately hit black people. Detroit and, you know, state of Michigan, 13 percent of our population is black. Yet, 40 percent of the fatalities in Michigan have been black people. And so we say it's not OK to say, well, we need an urban solutions or we need to address these issues in Detroit. We need to specifically fund programs that decrease the health disparity between black people, that decrease the economic disparities from an employability standpoint as well as a small business standpoint.

And so we need to be talking about how do we put real dollars into the black community to address a problem that people started out by saying, you know, COVID-19 did not see race, it did not see class. But the data suggests that it absolutely does. And it has burned through the black community in ways that other people may not have expected. And so I think we should be talking about real funding that is dedicated towards addressing these issues in the black community. Thank you.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much for really bringing together a lot of threads, and also invoking the legacy of civil rights based on names. And bringing, of course, the case of Emmett Till forward and identifying the many other cases that we should be considering in this context.

We appreciate the questions that are starting to come in written via Q&A. We will open Q&A after all the panelists have spoken. And I will go over the ground rules at that time. So thank you so much.

Next we will hear from Mitchell Esajas, co-founder and chair of the New Urban Collective, a network of students and young professionals from diverse backgrounds, with a focus on the Surinamese, Caribbean, and African diaspora. In 2016, he co-founded the Black Archives in Amsterdam, a cultural resource center unique in Europe for its expansive documentation of Dutch colonialism. The leadership that he has shown has catalyzed numerous political actions to address cultural traditions that glorify racism, which led to even him being personally targeted by racially motivated violence.

Mr. Esajas, please. We look forward to learning from your personal experience in grappling with an international perspective of how what has happened in the United States has inspired your own work. The floor is yours.

ESAJAS: OK. Well, thanks for the introduction and the invitation. Indeed, my name is Mitchell, representative from the New Urban Collective, based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, roots in Suriname. And I think we're living in a very interesting moment. Over the past two weeks, the biggest protests against racism in Dutch history have been taking place. I've been involved in organizing one of them – two of them, I have to say, last week on Dam Square in the city center of Amsterdam. A protest took place initially organized with intention to show solidarity with the people in the United States, and also to address the institutional racism, the police brutality which people of color and black people are experiencing right here.

And yeah, I'm involved in a movement called Kick Out Zwarte Piet, which has been organizing and mobilizing people over the past five to six years to gain attention and stimulate policy change around the issues of race in the Dutch context. And up until now, have the biggest number that we have been able to mobilize – over a thousand people. And last week, around 10-15,000 people attended in the context of COVID-19. So that was quite unique, historic moment in the Dutch context.

So, yeah, we've been thinking about and discussing why so many people decided to show up. We've been engaged in some conversations about it. And I think it relates to the last speaker, Mr. Hollier. It made me think about Emmett Till as well. I've been in touch with several people – people from Surinamese and African communities, who called me and actually started crying – literally crying – because they saw the video of George Floyd being – I could almost say it was a modern-day lynching, being suffocated in broad daylight. And it brought tears to a lot of people. It touched people in a very emotional way. I think that was a trigger for people to take action.

But it also sparked something inside of people to, yeah, relate the situation in the United States to what is happening right here in the Netherlands. Because when we look at the Dutch context, I think a big difference between the Netherlands and the United States, and to a certain extent also the U.K., that's a very dominant narrative which anthropologist Gloria Wekker calls "white innocence." Which means that in the Netherlands, people tend to say that, you know,

we're one of the most open, tolerant, and equal countries in the world. We may have been involved in histories of colonialism and slavery but, you know, it's a thing of the past. So it's quite hard to even acknowledge that there is a problem of institutional racism in the Dutch context because of this dominant narrative of innocent.

Now, over the past – over the past five years, I've been involved in trying to shift this dominant narrative, shift this discourse, especially by organizing nonviolent protests in relation to a very popular tradition, called Sinterklaas. It's a tradition in which white people dress up in blackface. A very problematic tradition. The rest of the world understands that, but it's still the most popular national tradition in the Netherlands. So over the past five years we've been making some steps and improvement in creating space in the public discourse to address the issue of race. But over the past two weeks there has been a very interesting shift in terms of the number of people that have been engaged, but also in terms of the political response.

For instance, for the first time the prime minister of the Netherlands even used the words of “institutional racism,” acknowledged that there's such a thing as systemic racism in the Netherlands. So that has been an interesting development. Because when we look at these issues, institutional racism, there are all kinds of examples. There's an NGO called Controle Alt Delete who has – which has done research on police brutality or police violence in the Netherlands. And together with Amnesty International they published a report that it is, indeed, a structural problem. And over the past four years, 41 people, yeah, died because of police violence.

So although the scale is very different when compared to the scale – the scale in terms of – the number of people who died from police violence – compared to the U.S., every person – each person that does from police violence is one too many. So we're in the middle of the process of this moment, this movement, since that first protest in Amsterdam. Almost every day different protests have been taking place in different cities across the Netherlands, which is also quite unique and historical. And currently we're trying to, yeah, think about ways to use this momentum to, yeah, put pressure on, yeah, politicians both on the national and local level to, yeah, develop policies to address these different forms of institutional racism.

And I think I'll leave it with that for now.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you so much for your remarks. And we also really appreciate how you brought the anthropological perspective to this. And I hope that in our questions we can tease a little bit more of your expertise out on that through the work, of course, that you've done in pouring over numerous documents that have been left in terms of the legacy of the challenges we face.

So our last panelist is Karen Taylor. She is the chair of the European Network Against Racism, also known as ENAR, as well as the head of political communication at Each One Teach One, a community-based education and empowerment project in Berlin, Germany. Additionally, Ms. Taylor has served on a coordination group of German implementation for the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. Ms. Taylor, we look forward to hearing about your involvement in multilateral initiatives and what work that ENAR

has done in terms of public and political statements, and really how we look at leveraging international commitments to support each other and engage.

So, please, you have the floor for your opening remarks. Please unmute your microphone.

TAYLOR: There you go. OK. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak here. So I think it's crucial that at this time we come together transatlantically to exchange and to also learn and hear from each other. I mean, we see here in Europe and ENAR, the European Network Against Racism, has been working for decades on this as ENAR is the only pan-European network combining racial equality advocacy with building a strong network of anti-racist organizations against Europe. And we see why this is crucial, because in Europe there's a huge lack – a huge lack of the realization of the deep structural discrimination – racial discrimination that has been ongoing. And linked to that or connected to that the lack of data we have in most European countries.

So here we see that most of the testimonies we get, most of the reports that we get are from our grassroots organizations. This is where we have the knowledge. This is where we have the insights of what is going on the ground, and especially connected to police brutality, that the EU hides behind the fact that it's not responsible for this portfolio and that it's mostly the member states, which have to be urged to move on, on these questions. And here again we see that the national grassroots organizations are the ones who have been fighting for decades, are the ones who are trying to protect and empower their communities. We also see that these are the ones who are raising awareness on the political landscape.

And that's also why I'm, to be honest, a bit worried about the dynamic which is ongoing, because in a lot of countries – such as Germany, but also got requests from the Netherlands, from Spain – we are now starting with the – starting the conversation with the question: Does racism exist? And it's not only on the national member state level, but also even within the European Commission, where the vice president of the European Commission openly said that we don't have the same problems as in the U.S. We have – we might have a pattern of social disparities when it comes to the social wellbeing of our communities, but there isn't such a thing as police violence and structural racism.

So what ENAR just did, we wrote an open letter, together with 152 organizations from across Europe, to address this because our political leaders have the responsibility to not only see what is going on, but to also come up with political solutions for these issues. So I would like to highlight six key recommendations we within our network came up with to fight police violence and to address police violence. And the first thing, and I just close my introduction with that, was that leaders need to acknowledge and condemn police violence and deaths of racialized groups because, as I just started, a lot of member states denied the fact that – deny the reality.

A second key issue here would also be to really look into investing into our communities, and divesting from law enforcement. It can't be that national governments pour their financial resources in measurements and in acts that torture and kill our communities and not invest in the communities and in the grassroots organizations which actually do the work to protect us. Third

thing would be we definitely need sanctions. What we see is in a lot of cases across Europe – I mean, there are so many cases which really pop into my head right away where the authorities and the police officers are not trialed, or if they have to appear in front of a court they are let go easily.

We just had a recent case in France which also went through the media of – yeah, of a rape of a young black man where the police officers involved were reinstated with a little slap on their hands. And this is what we see. So at the end, we must believe that what is happening to our communities is not of relevance for the main society, and on the other hand can even be dealt with as a minor – as a minor incidence.

Fourth key issue here would be to really investigate into deaths in custody. In Germany there was a campaign launched recently. The campaign is also called Death in Custody, which had a collection of 154 cases of deaths in custody since 1990. And over 60 percent of these cases were not dealt with by the authorities. And even around 50 percent were even not acknowledged as deaths. They were caused suicides. They were called accidents, and so on. So there really must be inquiries into these kinds of cases.

A fifth recommendation here would be, and this is something which ENAR is actively working with the community organizations to adopt at the national level, we need to have national action plans against racism. We still need to have kind of benchmarks for our communities. So we need a clear definition of racism. When we look at France, where we see that racism – say that racism doesn't exist because of égalité in this country. When we look at Germany, racism is only perceived as a right-wing extremism, where people die. Anything below that threshold is not called racism.

So we – across Europe we see this problem of a lack of a definition of racism. And a national action plan does need to provide such a definition. It does need to provide measures how to include our communities into every sector of daily life when it comes to the problems we have in the housing sector and the labor market, and so on. And of course, we do need to have a kind of monitoring, because it's great to say we want to fight racism within our structures, but we also need to come back and say after a certain time, this worked, this didn't. So we need to change our approach here.

And the last thing would be – and this is also something which I've been repeatedly saying – we need equality. And I was shocked to hear this report on the impact of COVID-19, that there was no political answer to that, even though this report clearly states how our communities have been affected by it. I must say, and your report is something which we here in other European countries and also ENAR have been turning to and saying: This is something we need.

There is an inquiry going on in the German parliament right now asking the government to look into this because in a lot of countries we can't even say what the impact on our communities are. There is – where ENAR tried to shed light into this field with our COVID-19 map, which you can find on our website, where we mapped cases of racial discrimination linked to COVID-19. And we even had to map three deaths caused by police brutality, three deaths of

men of an Arab background. So we see that the scale of racial discrimination during this COVID-19 crisis even exploded. And what we already had before is just more pregnant with the – with the bigger focus on our community.

So yeah, to wrap up, these equality data which do need to be collected by the member state are a key issue to talk about what has been going on, so that this whole discussion about us being angry and about us stating individual cases, this is such a good shift to have a real discussion of dealing with structural problems here which need to be addressed structurally. Thank you very much.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you so much, Ms. Taylor. As we're running at least short on time for the first phase of this, I wanted to lay the ground rules for our question and answer period. I see that several of you have already written questions using the functions of Webex. For those who wish to ask a question, you can write it in this format, and I will work it into the conversation. Or, you could raise your hand and we will start a queue that will allow you to video in and ask the question directly of our panelists.

So at this stage, as our member of Parliament needs to get back to committee business, I wanted to give her an opportunity to respond to some of the questions that were written by Bettina Gardner (sp) as well as Mitchur Gillali (ph), which covered issues related to the need for reconciliation and healing with deescalate tensions, and what sort of policies are being explored to do that, but also policy prescriptions on how to be an ally as we bring communities into support those that have been impacted, as well as some specific policing questions such as certain warrants, such as no-knock warrants in the United States, or other challenging policies that have been shown to disproportionately impact communities. So a lot of issues there. It would be great if you would offer any of your thoughts on any of those questions raised. Thank you, MS. Oppong-Asare.

And please unmute your microphone.

OPPONG-ASARE: OK. Sorry, I'm not using to using this Cisco Webex.

So I'll start with the first question, from Ms. Gardner (sp) about whether there's been any policy prescriptions being written in each of the countries. So I'll talk about in the U.K. So in the U.K., so with my party, we're in opposition, what the government has done is they haven't actually written anything with regards to how to be an ally. There's nothing really that's being done on that. And also it's important to be aware that the BLM movement kind of just kind of rocketed in the last week.

What we have been doing in our own communities is we've been mapping out and doing things individually. So I've been doing stuff where I basically have been recommending books on race equality that allies could read, so they could understand race inequality. I've also been talking about how in workplaces addressing inequality and stuff. In terms of a national scale within my party, this is something that we are now looking to do. So the – Keir Starmer has made announcements, which was the leader of my party, just yesterday, measures to improve ethnic minority representation within the party, which I think is a positive step forward.

Also to address – to do training to address unconscious bias, so people recognize how they may have biases in doing things. And then also he’s commissioned Doreen Lawrence, who is the mother of Stephen Lawrence who was murdered in 1990, to basically do a review basically looking at how COVID has impacted ethnic minorities in the U.K., and to come up with recommendations to address this. So I hope that answers your question. And I know that with the city councils – I think you say city councils in the U.S. – they are also doing individual things. And Sadiq Khan, who is the mayor of London, is doing something – London-wide thing where he set up a commission to also address this. So work is being done on a – on a government level. I wouldn’t say that’s close to being done.

And then (outlawing ?) – (inaudible) – preventing – (inaudible) – from turning negative, what can be done to suggest political and community leaders to prevent escalation? So what I’ve done is I’ve made an announcement not long ago, basically publicly saying to people: Look, this weekend we have some concerns. You know, I support the Black Lives Matter movement, but we are concerned about the far-right coming out this weekend, because I’m seeing on social media they’re looking to cause trouble.

I’ve also mentioned about in America, how what we’ve seen the stats in terms of people dying from COVID has increased, particularly when going on marches. I’m urging people to, if they are going to go on a march, practicing social distancing, which we know is really difficult. Making sure that they wear their gloves and masks to protect themselves. And also to say that, look, there are other ways we can make positive change, and to urge people not to get into any violent conflict even though it’s difficult because it undermines the movement in terms of what it stands for. So I hope that answers – have I missed anything else, Alex? OK.

JOHNSON: That covered quite a bit of ground. Thank you so much for being so generous with your time. And we understand if you need to run to your committee business. We will continue the conversation with our remaining panelists, and address some of the questions that come up. Thank you so much for joining us.

OPPONG-ASARE: Thank you. Nice to meet you guys. Take care. Bye.

JOHNSON: And I also wanted to mention how it was great that she raised the story of – and the work of Doreen Lawrence in the U.K., in particular She is no stranger to the OSCE context, in that she participated in a human dimension meeting on combatting racism in Vienna, Austria. So there is this nexus between all of us being engaged, representing from OSCE-participating states, but also looking at, for our particular purposes, human rights at home and what we can learn from each of you in terms of this engagement in this moment.

So at this stage, I would also like to remind colleagues and participants to write question in the Q&A box using the Webex functions, but also using the buttons to raise your hands to be able to join the conversation. I actually see we have a number of esteemed international participants who have joined us – elected officials from elsewhere, including a senior leader who’s worked on these issues in the U.K. government with former Prime Minister May. I think we’ll actually start with his question since I see his hand raise.

Nero, please, you have the floor.

Q: Hi, Alex. Can you hear me?

JOHNSON: Yes. We hear you.

Q: Great. Thank you very much for organizing this. I think it's been a fantastic and eye-opening conversation. As you know, here in the U.K. I was responsible for delivering to the race disparity audit in the U.K., which was an audit looking at the experiences of people from black and minority ethnic communities in the U.K. public services. And that led to a number of policy responses that we could put in place. Since we've left, that's not been progressed much, but I hope at some stage it will continue to be progressed. And that's something we can learn from in different countries across Europe, and so on.

My main question, I know a lot of issues are talked about, but there are two key issues that I think it would be good to hear responses from the panelists. One is about the partnership between people of African descent in Africa, in Europe, and the United States. That's happening on some level at kind of a political level, with maybe one or two contacts. I think we need to strengthen those partnerships. We need to find a way to bring it to the ground, to really begin to allow these issues to bubble up to the surface, and force action on that.

The second area I think I would like to hear from them about is the issue about economic empowerment, because I think it's one thing to battle injustice and fight individual cases that come up, but the overall issue here is about the poverty of people from black and minority communities in these different countries. How do we begin to empower people? Because I think in the end that's something that would lead to much better political engagement and participation, and hopefully longer-term change.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you so much for that question, and also raising your important work on the race audit. I'd like to open the floor to our panelists. Is there anyone who'd like to join in in responding to these issues of economic empowerment and other questions?

All right, Senator Hollier, please.

HOLLIER: I would like to talk about the issue of economic empowerment. I think that is the fundamental issue, because it's the fundamental issue as to why we are seeing systemic racism, right? So the African slave trade was how America was built, in many ways how the European economy was built, and the legacy of that continues today as we talk about access to capital and all of those things. And – (inaudible) – are being erased through the COVID-19, you know, pandemic, where you're seeing a significant number of small businesses who are undercapitalized, who have greater difficulty getting access to loans, and financing, and short-term ability to manage.

And so it's really important that we have these independent and autonomous spaces that can provide both start-up capital but sustainable funding for some of these entities. So you often see these discussions as we talk about the African continent and who is investing in Africa. And you see it's the Chinese government because they have resources today. It is not us investing in black people in Africa. It is investing in the country or the continent and, you know, pulling our resources and trying to build wealth for people who are not from that space. And you see those same kind of issues in urban communities, as people move back into them.

So it's really important as government and people who are concerned with these issues that we address that fundamental issue of a lack of ability to start business and then develop the equity necessary to be sustainable, but also to be able to weather, you know, the issues that you've seen with COVID-19 and the type of industries that we can get into. But I think that is the question. And the only way we're going to solve it is if we're willing to say that we should be investing directly into black communities, and with black people, and that those investments are managed and run by black people. So it's great to see foundation communities that are investing in black issues, but they need to have black and brown people who leading those discussions and are actually empowered to make the big decisions around them.

JOHNSON: Thank you. Would anyone else like to raise on these issues? I see Karen has unmuted.

TAYLOR: Yeah. I would like to add to really raising this link between the diasporas, and Europe, and the Americas to the African continent. I believe this is a very important question that we all need to deal with. And the organization I work for, EOTO, Each One Teach One, here in Berlin, Germany, is exactly doing that with its program. We have an Afro-literature festival where we regularly invite people from the Americas as well as from Africa, because what we see with our communities – who are far from the mother continent – that there's a lack of knowledge what has been going on.

And that history which we all share is something which has not spread within our communities. So we are kind of infiltrated by this – yeah, by this very white narrative that the African continent doesn't have a history, that the African continent doesn't exist of the (liberated ?) societies and developed societies. And this is something we have – we inherit here in the diaspora. This is something which disempowers us, and it's something which makes us believe that actually, yes, we are minor to the white society.

So I believe it's absolutely important that we do see what our – what our ancestors and from Africa have been doing, have been doing within their societies, and to get that knowledge and to work together, and because of a lot of questions when it comes to decolonization, when it comes to economic empowerment, when it comes to philosophy. And a lot of questions have been raised or have been discussed within Africa, with a different perspective just lacking here in Europe and I guess in the Americas as well.

JOHNSON: Thank you. And I see Mitchell, do you have some thoughts to add here?

ESAJAS: Yeah. I think I agree with Karen. There's a lot to learn from the histories of our ancestors in terms of organizing. And yeah, when we think about the first question I think there is much more potential in terms of cooperation, transatlantic cooperation, cooperation between African diaspora communities within Europe. You know, you would think that given the technologies that we have access to that there would be much more, yeah, communication. But in my opinion, it has been lacking, to be quite frank.

And especially when you put in a historical context, on a daily basis I work at the Black Archives. As I said, this archive takes focus on documenting black history in the Dutch context. But when I look at the collection that we have – and we have a few special collections of activists who have been active since the 1920s and '30s – to me it seems that paradoxically enough in that period there was a much more intense cooperation, transatlantic connection, within the African diaspora than now, even though we have much more technological, yeah, possibilities.

And, yeah, to give one example, in our collection we have a special collection of a person who was born in Suriname – I'll give the very short version – a person born in Suriname who ended up in New York at a very young age. Otto Huiswoud was his name. He became the only black co-founder of the Communist Party. Traveled all around the world in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. Ended up in Amsterdam in the 1950s, '60s. And throughout his life, he was active in connecting the African diaspora.

And it also relates to the second question of economic empowerment, because there have been debates historically between people like Marcus Garvey, with a strong focus on economic self-reliance, economic empowerment. But on the other hand, there has been a critique on that as well by people like Otto Huiswoud, Langston Hughes, and other people active in more black radical and black socialist communities, stating that when we look at issues of race, racism, it's also related to capitalism because in this economic system we often see that there are black people, people of color, who are – who are predominantly represented in lower levels of the economic system.

So I think we should – there's a lot to learn about these historic debates. And that's why it's so important to have things like EOTO, the Black Archives. And we should look at possibilities to learn from this history and implement it in this current context.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much. I think it was great that you mentioned that historical context. I remember personally seeing, of course, the correspondence you have in your collection in terms of letters from Langston Hughes to his colleagues in the Netherlands at that time. You know, a famous American author working on advancing in the civil rights movement trying to build that transatlantic solidarity. So this is nothing new. And in terms of leveraging international commitments, this is an opportunity to address that.

We have at this stage one question from the crowd from Bethany Johnson. Please, the floor is yours. Please state your affiliation as well.

Q: Hi. Good morning. Thank you so much for speaking with us. I am a student at a graduate program at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. I also work at the Polar Institute, part of the Wilson Center think tank.

And my question has to do with the idea around systematic racism and what that looks like for – not only with police brutality, but also further along in the justice system when we look at – when we look at rates of incarceration and what that impact has on our communities. And so my question – possibly for the senator or Ms. Taylor – would really be around what, moving forward, as we get into these longer discussions of making concrete change, do you think that might look like with changing the system of incarceration and how we deal with these issues, and changing what has happened in the past. So kind of rectifying these issues. Thank you, again, for your time.

HOLLIER: I guess I can answer that. So I think when you start talking about police there are kind of a couple phases of what does change look like in police? So there is the civilian oversight piece, which has been I think very successful in the city of Detroit. Got a good friend working on, you know, reforms in the city of Miami, county of Miami. And so there are models. He's named Rodney Jacobs, if you're interested. I certainly encourage you to look at some of the things that they're pushing down there right now.

But it is – as you talk about systemic racism, it's every single avenue from your interaction with the police into who is – you know, who is accounting in that police force, right? So does that police force have a diverse background? Do they understand their community? Do they do that? If so, then they have a different interaction than someone who doesn't. The second piece is, what is our system designed to do, right? So I have legislation to change the way resisting and obstructing laws work. So right now you get pulled over, you get arrested. If you – you know, depending upon the interaction you have with that officer they may say you're resisting.

So instead of you getting one felony you end up with two felonies, and you can't have that expunged. So the next time you interact with law enforcement you have, you know, the longer, broader record. It makes it more difficult for you to get employment. And so then you're saying, well, all right, that was that one police interaction. What did the prosecutor do? So the prosecutor could have said, all right, those are legitimate charges. We're going to charge you or not charge you. Or they could look in the rulebook and say: Well, based on the interaction that you had with that police officer we can justify these five charges. And they do those five things to, you know, encourage you to plead down to a lesser thing, so they don't have to take you to court.

And then if you say, well, if you did actually get into court, what does that jury pool look like? So a lot of data suggests that having a person of color on a jury makes a black man almost 30 percent less likely to get convicted. Having a black man on that jury makes you, like, 60 percent less likely. So we see that every section and every layer of our justice system has a racial context, the same way all of our other layers do, right? So, you know, three months ago people would not say that COVID-19 had a racial context. But we see that it does because it attacks comorbidities which, of course, have a higher incidence in the black community. So it's trying

to say there are so many systemic things that we need to fix, let experts in those areas drill down and look at them and say: Hey, we're committed to fixing them.

So the big thing that all this comes down to is funding. We need people who are willing to fund the fixes, because these problems and these systems were designed in a manner to support economic activity from other vantage points, whether that had been, you know, slavery, or Jim Crow, or, you know, a host of other entities that were designed and subsequently reformed to allow individuals who kept those resources to keep them. I mean, as a student at Georgetown I was glad to see them address how they profited from the slave trade, and their changes in that process. Slavery impacts all of our government because it's the foundation for – in many ways – for our system. And Jim Crow and all those kind of things are not that old. And I think when you look at that in context, you're able to see the differences and the need for change across the board.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you, Senator. I know the question from Ms. Johnson was also directed at some of our other panelists, if any of you would like to respond.

TAYLOR: Yes, I would like to. I see within the protest movements which are going on right now, I see that there's a different kind of pressure on authorities and on governments to address structural racism and to address police violence. So what I believe will shift from here is – and Germany might be an example here, where the ministers of interior agreed on investigating racial profiling – cases of racial profiling, even though one must say – not long ago, I could even say the day before yesterday, the German government denied the existence of racial profiling, because it's forbidden by German law. So if it's forbidden, it can't be.

So what we do see here is that these problems which have been pinpointed by the protesters, we see that this protest from the street is trying to move on into the institutions, and that several questions are being addressed. And what I would also like to add is when we have this all discussion, we did see from the media, which also contacted us at the European Network Against Racism, but which also contacted the national organization I work for, EOTO. And everybody was shocked when they found out that there is no data on police violence. There is no data on incidents of racial discrimination by public authorities and public authorities in areas of incarceration, or custody in general.

So I also believe that this whole discussion about what do we need to document is also going to shift. And starting from there, we can actually highlight what has been going on, and then say, OK, we have an issue here, and then move on into what do we need to do against it.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you so much. I know we had another request for the floor from Alfiaz Vaiya, former with the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup. He was a key coordinator in working with a number of European parliamentarians at that stage. So, Alfiaz, the floor is yours to ask a question.

Q: Thank you, Alex. And thank you to all of the panelists. It's been a very interesting discussion.

I had two questions. I think the first one was on political organizing. So we're seeing a lot of people come out and protest. And you know, there's been a lot of – in the U.K., at least, there's been a lot of anger at the deaths, the black, minority, ethnic deaths, the high prevalent deaths, and also the George Floyd murder. But I'm wondering how we translate that into political organizing. How do we grab – take this momentum? And, you know, in the U.S. you have the 2020 presidential elections. In Europe we have some significant elections. But how do we mobilize our communities to become more politically organized and politically involved, and then getting out the votes? That's the first question, how do we use this momentum to turn that into political organizing?

And the second question is, it's a little bit more related to the COVID issues that, you know, we're seeing a lot of responses around COVID which, you know, talking about a digital response, a green response. But I haven't really heard much about an inclusive response. You know, like, the financial package, you know, it's – and I wonder how much that's going to affect our communities going forward? If we're already suffering in terms of health inequalities and inequities, our communities have been – in the U.K. – you know, have been severely affected financially, in health, in many different ways. And I'm wondering how should we be arguing for economic inclusion and arguing for specific measures for our communities, because our communities need that support? But I just keep on hearing about the green – this is going to be an opportunity to go green, to go digital. But I'm not really hearing much in terms of economic thinking in terms of inclusion and, you know, leveling up, and bringing communities who have long suffered back to the level. Thank you.

JOHNSON: So thank you for those points, on political organizing, voting, as well as advancing economic inclusion. Would any of you like to jump in? Maybe Mitchell, since he didn't respond to the last question? And let's unmute your microphone. Sorry.

ESAJAS: Yes, there I go. (Laughs.) I think I can start with the first question on political mobilization and how to use this momentum. We've been thinking about this over the past few days, obviously. Especially here in Amsterdam, we have a large number of people of African descent, people with Caribbean roots who have been out protesting over the past few weeks. And I already see that as a form of political participation.

I actually had a debate yesterday with one of the Dutch parliamentarians of the liberal party D66. And one of the big issues, one of the big challenges we've been facing for decades is the quite low level of political participation in terms of voting. The percentage of people of Surinamese and Caribbean descent who go out to vote both at the local and the national level is the lowest of all minority groups in Amsterdam and in the Netherlands.

So the mere fact that quite a lot of them have participated in these protests, to me, I think is an opening, a great space to inform them in this political process. So one of the things that we aim to do here is we mobilize them a lot through social media, Facebook, Instagram. And we've created a list, a mailing list, in which people, yeah, can sign up for with an aim to, you know, keep them engaged, keep them informed because next year on March 17th we will have, yeah, national elections.

So our aim is to use this momentum, first of all, to mobilize as many people as possible, to keep them engaged through social media, creating these mailing lists. And, yeah, we're still in the middle of, you know, thinking and processing everything. But on July 1st we celebrate Keti Koti, which is the national abolition of slavery. And because of COVID-19, you know, big events are not allowed. But it is allowed to protest if you adhere to certain, you know, rules. I don't know about other countries, but in the Netherlands, if you keep 1 1/2-meter distance you are allowed to have large gatherings or large protests.

So one of the ideas that we have is to, yeah, digitally gather as much information and input as possible from all these people that have been engaged, about their ideas of, you know, what needs to change, what policies should be, you know, implemented, and create a draft manifesto. And that manifesto we would like to present to several party leaders and, yeah, get them committed to, you know, adopt these proposals in their platforms which will they use during the elections of next year.

So these are ideas that we are thinking about. It still has to be, yeah, developed a bit further, but we do think this is a great opportunity to involve especially the young people going out on the streets now.

JOHNSON: Great. Would anyone else like to raise, address issues around economic inclusion that were raised, or expand the thoughts that were raised earlier? I see Karen would like to jump in.

TAYLOR: Yeah, always great to hear you, Alfiaz. You have been missed at the European Parliament and in Brussels.

So your first question – right on point as always – it's, I think, the question all organizations and of course political leaders who deal with these questions need to ask themselves. How do we get this protest from the streets into the institutions? What my organization has been doing – EOTO – is, in general, advocacy and connecting this protest, connecting this awareness we have right now to the ongoing discussions in Germany. So in Germany, for instance, there has been – yeah, Merkel, the chancellor, she recently introduced a committee after the shooting in Hanau at the beginning of this year where nine people of, yeah, Arab background were shot by a right-wing extremist, and they all died. So after this incident Merkel herself introduced a committee against racism, right-wing extremism, and anti-Semitism.

And what we are doing now is this committee has started to work, and we see that black people and people of African descent are not part of this agenda. So what we do is we take this momentum we have right now, and highlight it for our advocacy and efforts to say how is it possible that a committee on a government level which is dealing with racism for the very first time in Germany is not including the issues of people of African descent. And you do see, when you look at the streets – last weekend over 180,000 people went to the streets, most of them being black and brown people, so what you do see here is an issue; you need to shed a light on this. This is one of the, yeah, measures we have taken right now.

Another step is by the chairs of our organization, of EOTO, Daniel Gyamerah and Saraya Gomis, they founded the black policy agenda, they created a hashtag around it, and they have been sharing this policy agenda because the media is coming and asking us do you experience racism, and we tell them that's not a question we want to talk about; what we do want to talk about is what our community needs. And then we came up, they came – sorry, they came up with this black policy agenda which, you know, we do all support and spread the word, and also connect it with our other organizations and let them know that, please, bring your input. Of course, protest is important, but we also need to show what solutions we have and bringing them forward.

And also this whole discussions about the packages which have been made around the COVID – around the economic impact of COVID, I believe that the new normal which everybody is talking about will or has to include us, our communities as the main communities which not only have been affected by COVID, but were affected by the impact of capitalism in the beforehand. So that this question is even on the table right now, I believe that that will change.

Also, the new organizations and the new empowering around the communities, I think COVID shed a light on what communities are capable of. We see that our communities are now regrouping, reorganizing, and also kind of re-granting their wealth, trying to push it towards those who need it most. So I do think that this self-empowerment is also there right now.

JOHNSON: Great. Thank you.

Senator Hollier, do you have any questions or would you like to respond to this question before we move on to our next request for the floor?

HOLLIER: I think you can go on to the next one. I think they really summed it up. You know, the only thing I would say around political inclusion is I think there has been some discussion, particularly here, as folks say, well, voting doesn't matter and, you know, it's what – the protest is what mattered. And I'd say, well, we need and what we continue to need are this kind of coordinated effort, right, so that the reason that we're seeing so much more change – and the places we're seeing change as a result of protest – is because we have elected people who have been wanting to do and make these changes, but with the increased momentum and then finally being in the seat, they're able to make the kind of changes that you want to see, right?

So you look at the House of Representatives, you know, introducing a pretty robust criminal justice reform around policing, that would not have happened with different people in those seats two years ago. And so as we look forward to these kind of discussions, it's important that people understand that developing the space for people to be open is just as important as having the people in positions to make a decision and then holding them accountable.

JOHNSON: Excellent. Thank you so much.

I know that we'll move to another request for the floor. In the chat we had a few points raised on education programs as well as symbols of slavery, in terms of statues. I'd like to give

the floor to Karen Kaneza, who is the co-chair of the African Diaspora Youth Forum based in Brussels. So, Karen, the floor is yours.

Q: Thank you. Can you hear me?

JOHNSON: Yes, we can. Welcome, thank you.

Q: Perfect. Thank you. It's nice to see you guys again.

I'm Karen Kaneza. I'm a former also board member of ENAR. I'm co-chair of an organization called the African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe, and actually what I was saying and pointing out is that it's really a momentum like Alfiarz said because for the protests that started in U.S., now you can see that Europe also protests. And unhappily, in Brussels, like Sunday, you had around 10,000 people who protested in Brussels against police violence or brutality, but also they were protesting the history of Belgium that were not yet in education programs. And they were also asking for a long time for people to get to understand and know the history of Leopold II, who was one of the Belgium's royal kings and who has done a lot of damages in the Congo. And some people are also talking about a genocide, but it's still ongoing.

You can see that things like that are kindled bringing a timing where, like Alfiarz said, we want to know what kind of political organizations can be put in place in order not to make it just a moment where each year we will have to talk about the issues again, but how we can regroup and we can work together actually to go forward from the time being. And coming with that, during the European elections last year, I think we have recognized one of the programs called the Civic Engagement and have organized a program called Diaspora Vote, and the aim of that program was to mobilize the youth from the African diaspora in order for them to seek for representation on the EU elections and national elections as well.

So how can we kind of have an impact on programs on European levels like Karen said, like the Black Policy Agenda, for example, if you don't have representation? The aim on this first project was to create a sense of belonging and seek for representation through the European candidates from African origin or minority origin.

And with that, my question is how can we make sure that we can keep on making those kind of initiatives that are existing individually? How can we make sure that we can create a conglomerate or a bigger group in which we can make it – make it grow and even make it better for the following elections, for example, because I know that in Europe one of the biggest issues that we have is representation of people of African descent that kind of is not bringing into our own positive view in terms of not having enough representation – but how can we make sure with also European – how can we make sure that such programs do not stay just for one edition? How can we make it last on the long term?

JOHNSON: Thank you. Thank you so much for your thoughts, particularly, Karen, your experience with the Diaspora Vote initiative, but also your questions related to the sustainability of policies and political action, both for engaging the European Parliament as well as elsewhere.

Are there any thoughts from our panelists on some of the issues she raised about political inclusion?

(Pause.)

All right. Well, thank you for – oh, Karen? Thank you.

TAYLOR: I didn't get all the questions Karen raised, but she also – she linked her question to what Alfiaz already asked, right, that that was also – when we talk about political inclusion and representation. That's what I mostly got from the question, so yeah, Karen, I absolutely – and again, hi, Karen. (Laughs.)

Q: Hi, how are you?

TAYLOR: I absolutely – I absolutely agree with you that representation matters. We can't – there can't be any decisions about us without us, meaning we do need to come up with – and on every level – that's why I also mentioned the national action plans against racism, which the member states need to introduce. There it needs to be part of how can representations within political parties, but also within state governments, state authorities, can be ensured.

This only goes, I believe, by quotas. We've seen the struggle around women, around gender, so this is not new discussion we are having, and we already have the tools; we just need to apply them to our communities. I think people and decision makers here need to be bold enough to listen to us because we've been discussing this for a very long time, and actually just started with this kind of example. So we need to see this representation within the European institutions, across the – in our start at the movement in Brussels, so right, Alfiaz, and of course you, Karen, yourself were part of that.

So we need to shed a light on this, and here again, we need the data, we need the equality data to get the present situation to see, OK, so many people are white in these institutions, then come up with this threshold and with this – the benchmarks – excuse me – this is the number of representation we want to see, and then come up with a monitoring system, and then ask the question again, what do we need to do if we didn't reach the numbers.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much for that response. I think as we get towards the conclusion of our conversation, I really wanted to end with the question related to how do we look at leveraging international commitments. So I know some of you have been involved in the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, and there are a number of convenings – or policies have been worked on for a number of years since we are currently in this decade now, which will conclude here in the coming years.

So how can those policies that are emerging as a part of that process be translated into meeting the demands of those who've made it to the street?

I also wanted to raise how – the importance of looking at some of the OSCE's commitments in this regard in terms of the Ministerial Council decisions or signed-on

agreements of all the participating states that have looked at numerous commitments related to tolerance and non-discrimination and combatting racism and xenophobia.

So how do we use what our countries have signed up to to engage our communities and meet the needs of those who have been protesting? And with that also, any closing thoughts that any of you may have – among our panelist – of key takeaways you would like our participants to leave this conversation with.

So first I see Mitchell is unmuted. Would you like to take a shot at those issues?

ESAJAS: Yeah, sure. I'll speak to it from my perspective. As I said, I'm mostly active in Amsterdam – (inaudible). But when it comes to political mobilization, I think, yeah, the black communities in Amsterdam, yeah, have quite some influence compared to the national level. Currently we're working on – I'm also on the board of the anti-discrimination bureau here in Amsterdam, and it's the only organization which is registering Afrophobia or anti-black racism in the whole country. And the reason is that, over the past three, four years we've been trying to mobilize local people to push for, you know, monitoring and collecting data on the local level, partly, you know, based on the U.N. Decade for People of African Descent.

So in the coming months, we will work on a(n) action research project which was commissioned by the local municipal government of Amsterdam on anti-black racism, and idea is to gain insight into how, you know, people experience anti-black racism in the Netherlands in the Dutch context – the same here in Amsterdam – but also what, you know, people from different African and Caribbean communities, what kind of ideas they have about, you know, effective policy changes.

And, yeah, so I use that as an example of how, on a local level, African or black communities can have influence as well, and yeah, we aim to use this example to – you know, as a benchmark or as example for possible policy changes on the national level because, as I said earlier in the opening statement, in the Dutch context of white innocence, even to address the issue of institutional racism, yet alone specifically anti-black racism, is already a challenge. So, yeah, we see it as a little victory that this, you know, data is being collected, and the strategy is to, you know, upscale it to a national level.

And maybe we can – yeah, we should talk, Karen, that we can, you know, connect it to ENAR and other black communities and NGOs, so working on the European level.

JOHNSON: Maybe we'll shift to Karen, if you would like to offer some responses to the Decade, but also any closing thoughts, and then we'll conclude, too, with Senator Hollier before we move on to some other concluding thoughts. Thank you.

TAYLOR: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Alex, for raising the U.N. Decade for People of African Descent. We are right in the middle of this decade, and it will resume in 2024, and up till now, one must say it applies to the U.S. and it applies to Europe. It's been a toothless decade. We have the

member states of the United Nations signed to this – who signed this decade who believe that people of African descent are a specific group which need to – which issues need to be addressed. Even the motto of the decade, with “recognition, justice and development” – where I like to use empowerment rather than development – but never mind. So we have it in written – we have in written what the issues are, and we have the solutions in this decade. But no country so far has openly started a process on implementing the decade, and this is also something where we here in Germany have been pushing very hard for because how can it be the past decade for development and education – I believe that was the title of it – we saw in Germany the whole process around it with the focus ministry, with boards from different institutions, with civil society, with a lot of actors who were with – the monitoring board of the government – but with a lot of actors who were involved. So there was a high importance to implement this other decade. We don’t see that with the Decade for People of African Descent.

So what we do now – and I think this protest – these ongoing protests are a possibility to also spread the word about the decade because, to be honest, a lot of people in our community don’t even know that this decade exists. They don’t even know what they can do with it within their own organizations. So I believe this is the moment to really talk about it, to mention it, and to also say, governments, you really need to implement it.

Berlin is an example. We started a whole process around it. We started consulting (sic) the civil society, and now we are translating the demands civil society came up within this consultation process. We are translating them into measures that our administration can actually work with, so we do see that it’s possible to really address our communities because that’s what the decade also says: communities need to be involved from A to Z. So that’s really the core point I take from this decade. So, yes, let’s spread the word, and let’s put the pressure on our governments that they really need to implement this decade.

My closing remarks here would be let’s not lose this momentum. We’ve seen it in the past in the Black Lives Matter movement in several countries. They had a spike, and then somehow this resolved into local organizations or even into disputes openly. And I believe that now is the time to really say we’ve seen the issues, we’ve addressed them. Let’s keep on working together.

So I take upon Mitchell’s invitation; I mean, we’ve been working together. There’s ENPAD, of course, and other organizations where we try to work together. So this is the moment to have these kinds of conversations and learn from each other, and to keep on going.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much.

And to offer the acronym and explanation of that, you said ENPAD, which is the European Network for People of African Descent. So thank you for raising those key points on our international commitments.

Senator Hollier, I’ll give you an opportunity for any closing thoughts in response here, and then I’ve got a few housekeeping concluding remarks.

HOLLIER: Yeah, thanks.

So I think the biggest thing, particularly in the American context, as a – I think often as black people we think about ourselves as from the continent, but there is a real disconnect because you can't say, oh, well, my people are from X nation. And I think there is a difficulty in people identifying directly with that nation and those folks that I think is different than some of the folks who are maybe first generation or second generation people of African descent who can say, hey, my people are from Nigeria or from the Caribbean.

And I think that causes our community to have a disservice in our ability to look back and engage across the continent in that transatlantic manner. But I think the interactions with, particularly, the German Marshall Fund and the work that you do at the Helsinki Commission has really helped to bridge the gap so that we have these relationships, and we know that there are folks who are doing this work that we can plug into. In the American context, it's easy to say, hey, well, what I need to be doing is the work that is on the ground here in Detroit, or that, you know, my family is from Mississippi, or those kind of things, and not reaching back and understanding the context in developing those relationships.

And that has been particularly important as we look at the kind of statements that have come out from the administration, the way that they change and discuss immigration statuses, and who is allowed and who is not allowed; the way that we develop programming around economics; and our own investments as we talk about making safe space for us to connect with folks, to talk about our visa policies. As, you know, policymakers like myself – making sure that our universities are open and engaging when they talk about students that are coming from the African diaspora to ensure that they have, you know, the ability to get visas, to get housing, to do those same kind of issues that we see other communities do.

This is one of those spaces where I think I often – and in the black community we often lean in and look towards the Jewish community that have been able to really develop very strong associations between American Jews and Israel. And I think it's one of the spaces that the Helsinki Commission and the German Marshall Plan have been, I think, particularly helpful in developing those initial conversations through programming and continued engagement or forums, that I think will be critical components as we start talking about developing the level of international trade and economic opportunity that is going to be critical for our two communities to come back into one community.

So I appreciate these opportunities, and I'm excited about working together on them.

JOHNSON: Thank you so much.

I really want to thank all of our panelists for phenomenal contributions. I want to remind our participants here and thank them, of course, for joining us from all over the world today.

We have an opportunity to really take action and respond to the tragedy here in the United States and beyond. We have provided on the website of this particular event resources that have been provided by our colleagues on the panel, but also there are biographical

information and further initiatives related to the Commission's work on these issues. Recently the Commission actually also had a podcast come out on communities at risk, impact of COVID-19, and OSCE's most vulnerable populations, which actually included contributions from Karen Taylor.

In the coming weeks, Chairman Hastings and other commissioners will embark on a series of hearing focused on human rights at home in the United States, as well as the review of OSCE commitments in that context. And I'd also like to indicate that several months ago Chairman Hastings introduced two pieces of legislation that have really a keen nexus with the issues underlying the challenges that we faced here. One was the Leadership Institute for Transatlantic Engagement Act, H.R. 6239, which actually fosters opportunities for exchange like the one you have seen in this briefing here. And so that's under consideration in the House Foreign Affairs Committee right now.

Additionally, Chairman Hastings consolidated a number of recommendations on inclusion in the U.S. federal workforce with his H.R. 6240, which is called the Federal Jobs Act, and that bill really is looking at how the U.S. workforce is becoming much more racially, ethnically, and otherwise diverse, and how important it is to engage and generate opportunities for full empowerment within our workforce in that regard. And with these solutions as our colleagues on the panel have mentioned here, we will be able to live up to our commitments in the OSCE space and beyond.

So I'd like to thank you, thank our panelists again for their thoughts. I'd like to thank Dr. Mischa Thompson, our senior expert here at the U.S. Helsinki Commission who is the leader on a number of these partnerships and initiatives, as well as Chairman Hastings for prioritizing this particular briefing, and to our commissioners who have expressed interest – and I know a lot of their staff have joined us here today.

To conclude this session, I did want to take this opportunity, as we close this briefing, to have a moment of silence for – and keep this line open as we all have sat here – for eight minutes and 46 seconds for those who have not, in other contexts, had an opportunity to really reflect on how much time that is, to honor George Floyd, Adama Traore, and the countless other lives lost in racial violence, as well as the transatlantic slave trade.

So at this time I'm going to start our timer, leave our line open. And thank you so much for joining us, panelists and participants elsewhere.

(An eight-minute, 46-second period of silence was observed.)

JOHNSON: And with that eight minute and 46-second reflection, thank you so much for joining us today, and stay tuned for other hearings addressing human rights at home to be convened by our representatives and senators of the Commission.

Thanks again, and have a good day. Take care.

[Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the briefing ended.]

