



July 28, 2016

His Worship Jim Watson
Mayor of Ottawa
110 Laurier avenue west
Ottawa ON K1P 1J1

Dear Sir:

This week's Ottawa media headlines carried the shocking news that a 37-year old Somali-Canadian Abdirahman Abdi died on Monday after succumbing to injuries sustained after being pursued and, according to several witnesses, violently beaten by Ottawa police on July 24.

This tragic incident is part of an alarming pattern of police violence against black, Indigenous and marginalized people in Canada and across North America. This occurs against a backdrop of racial profiling that manifests itself through disproportionate harassment and surveillance of racialized communities and a culture of impunity for police.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has added its name to the broad-based community calls for a publicly transparent and accountable investigation into this week's brutal altercation in Ottawa. Incidents such as this do not happen in isolation, so it isn't appropriate to treat them that way. We must also examine the broader context of racism, Islamophobia, and other systemic issues that too often underpin them, as well as reviewing the police response to mental health issues.

On behalf of the 3.3 million members of the CLC, I am calling on you, and mayors across the country, to take the lead in striking municipal taskforces to investigate systemic racism and Islamophobia in policing and to review police training, guidelines, and protocols for the use of force and for responding to incidents involving individuals with mental illness, disabilities, or who are exhibiting mental distress.

In order to have impact, insight and credibility, these taskforces must include those most affected, such as victims' families and representatives of the racialized, Indigenous and other marginalized communities who have been the targets of this type of violence.

I also hope that you will join me in calling on provinces and territories to institute better oversight of police and to mandate anti-black racism, mental health and de-escalation training for every level of policing.

They must also lift the shroud of secrecy that often cloaks Special Investigations Units (SIU) and denies justice to the victims. Provincial and territorial governments must work to ensure that Police Acts across Canada are amended to ensure that police oversight bodies, such as SIUs, are more transparent and accountable.

Your leadership can set a new standard in policing, and you can help save lives.

Yours sincerely,

Hassan Yussuff
President