



## **Miami Committee on State Violence: A call for Strong Safe Communities**

On August 28th, 2014, in the aftermath of the killing of Mike Brown and the popular uprising in Ferguson, MO, nearly 200 Miami residents gathered to share their own experiences of State Violence. Our stories highlighted the fact that state violence is not just limited to police brutality; it also encompasses all of the repressive policies and practices of the courts, military, schools, and other government institutions. Here are the major takeaways from our first Speak Out:

**Structural injustices keep our communities insecure** – Depressed economic conditions, continued racial inequality, and the weight of state violence combine to create an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity in our communities. We are denied the basic human right to raise our families in safe and healthy environments – whether it’s going to bed hungry at night, being harassed or brutalized by the police, being imprisoned or deported, or having our children taken away.

**We must invest in healing** – Members of our communities have endured serious traumas, both from institutions such as the police and the Department of Children and Families, as well as from interpersonal forms of violence. In addition to creating spaces for us to come together and share our stories with each other, we also need effective and culturally competent social services brought directly into the communities that need them the most.

**We demand accountability from decision makers** – Our stories of state violence are extremely powerful. We call on local decision makers to come listen to these stories themselves and engage with us to begin making real institutional changes.

**We are strong when we come together** – We can achieve anything when we unite and struggle as one. It will take a powerful movement to address the injustices we face on a daily basis. The August 28<sup>th</sup> Speak Out and October 9<sup>th</sup> Town Hall are a good first start. We must continue to build, continue to grow, and continue to fight until all of our people are free.

The Miami Committee on State Violence was formed following the August 28<sup>th</sup> gathering. We are a community collaborative made up of local residents and grassroots organizations who’ve

come together to raise our shared concern about the impact of state violence on people in Miami's low-income and working class Black and Latino communities.

Our stories reveal that the root causes of our problems are systemic and that the change we need and desire must also be systemic. While many of the challenges we face are rooted in the unequal structure of our broader society, we can begin addressing the issue of state violence right here in Miami-Dade by transforming local policies, practices, and institutions. Therefore we offer the following as a program of action and call on local decision makers to work hand and hand with grassroots groups, organizations, and residents to put an end to state violence and build stronger safer communities.

**I. Community Driven Public Safety – *NOT Community Control***

**a. Demilitarize the police**

Military weapons and armored vehicles have no place in local policing. Police Departments in Miami-Dade County have at least six mine resistant or armored tanks, one is even waiting to be deployed on FIU's campus. The police should not be at war with their own communities, but the stockpiling of war machines and weaponry leaves us with the impression that they are preparing for just that. The examples of Ferguson, MO in August of this year and the 2004 FTAA protests in Miami demonstrate that when the police are militarized, this force is turned on local residents and citizens. This does not make our streets safer but rather contributes to the fearful relationship between community and police. In order to rebuild trust with the community, our police departments must:

- 1) Return all military equipment;
- 2) Stop participating in the Federal 1033 program which provides military equipment to local police; and
- 3) Commit to take a stand against the police tactics in Ferguson and never use armored vehicles or other military weaponry against your own community

**b. Stop Participating in the War on Drugs**

The war on drugs has devastated Black and Latino communities around the country. Harsh sentencing and overzealous policing in communities of color have terrorized our families and filled the prison system with our loved ones. While the war on drugs is backed by federal policy, there are steps that local law enforcement and the U.S. State Attorney can take to end Miami-Dade's participation in this war. Some of these steps include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Stop arresting and prosecuting individuals for minor non-violent offenses such as marijuana possession;
- 2) End the practice of using SWAT and other tactical forces to conduct searches or issue warrants; and
- 3) End the practice of seizing the personal property of individuals suspected of being involved in a drug related crime.

c. **End Racial Profiling**

Racial profiling by police produces a cloud of anxiety in communities of color in Miami. Over 65,000 people have been stopped and released since 2008 in Miami Gardens alone, a city with only 110,000 residents. These policies and practices are not only unjust, they are ineffective. They increase tensions between police and community residents and prevent meaningful collaborations that could create safer more secure environments. We must end racial profiling and the tactics that enable and support it:

- 1) Stop the disproportionate allocation of police in low-income Black and Latino communities;
- 2) End the constant monitoring and surveillance of Public Housing and other low-income housing developments; and
- 3) End the practice of Ticket and Arrest Quotas.

d. **Establish a Community Policing Code of Conduct**

In the past 25 years, none of the dozens of police killings in Florida have resulted in a prosecution by state or federal authorities. Effective policing must be based in community trust, and to reestablish that trust police departments and prosecutors must take several concrete steps:

- 1) Investigate and Prosecute Police Officers who use excessive force and/or unlawful deadly force as assertively and aggressively and with the same timeline as you would prosecute others who commit a violent crime.
- 2) Include the community in major decision making, such as the hiring of a new Police Chief and determining annual budget priorities.
- 3) Utilize restorative practices to hold officers accountable to individuals, families, and communities.

II. **Restorative Justice – *NOT Punishment and Incarceration***

When conflict and harm occurs in our communities, we need resolutions that address the needs of those who are impacted, hold individuals accountable, and strengthen our communities without isolating, ostracizing, or stigmatizing offenders. The criminal legal system and punitive school discipline policies fail to deal directly with the harm caused by crime or the root causes of wrongdoing. In fact, the forms of punishment executed by our current system have been shown to escalate conflict, reinforce violence, and further contribute to the deterioration of community relationships. Therefore we call for an end to the use of harsh punishments as a means of correcting harmful behavior. Instead we must implement restorative models of community healing and accountability:

- 1) Utilize Restorative Justice as an alternative to arrests and criminal prosecution; and
- 2) Implement Restorative Practices in Miami-Dade County Public Schools as an alternative to in-school and out-of-school suspensions or expulsions.

**III. Support trauma healing and family strengthening – *Social Services SHOULD NOT re-victimize our families.***

According to the mission of the Department of Children and Families, its role is to “protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency.” However, when DCF collaborates with local Police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to take children away from mothers who face serious challenges in the home, it often causes more harm than good. Rather than policing families and creating new traumas, DCF needs to live up to its own stated goals of reinforcing the existing resiliencies already present in our families and communities.

- 1) Utilize well trained culturally competent trauma specialists to work with families and prevent family separation
- 2) Stop collaborating with Police to remove children from mothers who’ve been victimized by domestic violence
- 3) Provide adequate resources to address cases of physical and sexual abuse against children who are in the care of the State.
- 4) Support grassroots groups to build community based healing networks that can address trauma at the neighborhood level.

**IV. Treat immigrant families and communities with respect – *End the raids, detentions, and deportations***

Every day in Miami-Dade tens of thousands of our community members must live their lives in the shadows. The ever present threat of detention and deportation forces undocumented immigrants - who have the same goals, motivations, and aspirations as anyone else - to provide for themselves and their families without basic civil liberties or worker protections. Breaking up families and terrorizing our communities does not make this country safer. The mistreatment and abuse of undocumented immigrants by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), police, and other law enforcement agencies is immoral, unjustifiable, and a violation of human rights. Although immigration is federal policy issue, local decision makers can take a stand to address the injustice of our current system:

- 1) End ICE raids in our communities
- 2) Stop detaining and deporting members of our community
- 3) Support family reunification for Haitians and all nationalities
- 4) Support fair and just immigration reform that is inclusive of all immigrants regardless of their legal status.