



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Reaction in the United States to the Grand Jury Decision Regarding the Death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri

As delivered by Chargé d'affaires Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 27, 2014

On Monday, November 24, a grand jury in St. Louis, Missouri returned a decision in which it determined that criminal charges should not be brought against the police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown in the town of Ferguson, Missouri, earlier this year. The grand jury decision was met with disappointment and anger by many Americans, leading to demonstrations in Ferguson and some other cities. While these demonstrations were largely peaceful, a number of individuals engaged in acts of violence and the Governor of Missouri sent the National Guard to assist police in responding to the situation.

On Monday night, President Obama spoke to the American people about the grand jury's decision, and joined Michael Brown's family in calling for anyone who protests to do so peacefully. In his statement, the President said:

"First and foremost, we are a nation built on the rule of law. And so we need to accept that this decision was the grand jury's to make. There are Americans who agree with it, and there are Americans who are deeply disappointed, even angry. It is an understandable reaction. But I join Michael Brown's parents in asking anyone who protests this decision to do so peacefully... I also appeal to the law enforcement officials in Ferguson and the region to show care and restraint in managing peaceful protests that may occur.

We need to recognize that the situation in Ferguson speaks to broader challenges that we still face as a nation. The fact is, in too many parts of this country, a deep distrust exists between law enforcement and communities of color. Some of this is the result of the legacy of racial discrimination in this country. And this is tragic, because nobody needs good policing more than poor communities with higher crime rates. The good news is we know there are things we can do to help. And I have instructed Attorney General Holder to work with cities across the country to help build better relations between communities and law enforcement."

In a separate statement, Attorney General Eric Holder said on Monday that while the local grand jury proceedings in Missouri had concluded, the U.S. Department of Justice is continuing with its investigation into the shooting of Michael Brown, as well as its investigation into allegations that the policing practices of the Ferguson, Missouri Police Department were not in keeping with the nation's constitution and laws. Our delegation will report to the Permanent Council on these federal investigations when they have concluded and information becomes publicly available.

On a personal note, I am saddened by the course of events surrounding the tragic death of Michael Brown. I join President Obama in saying that I am confident that if the American people focus our attention to address the underlying issues, then we can make progress to restore and improve public trust in law enforcement in communities around the country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.