

Protests follow the death of teenager in Liverpool

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Protests have taken place in Liverpool, England, following the death of 18-year-old Mzee Mohammed.

The teenager died July 13 after being detained by police. From facts that are known, police officers went to the busy Liverpool One shopping centre that evening in response to phone calls from the public.

When the police arrived, Mohammed was being detained by the shopping centre's security staff. The police arrested him and claimed that at around 6:30 p.m. he suffered a "medical episode" in their custody. Mohammed was rushed to Liverpool University Hospital where he was pronounced dead around 90 minutes later by doctors.

Merseyside Police claimed that Mohammed was behaving in a way that made officers "more concerned about his own wellbeing rather than the damage he could do."

There are unconfirmed reports that Mohammed had a knife and had been seen at several locations in the area of Toxteth and the city centre in the period immediately leading up to his death. He was last seen by his family at 1:30 p.m. His mother called emergency services to report him missing at around 10 p.m.. She and her family were informed of his death at around 1:30 a.m.

Since his death, video footage taken on a mobile phone has appeared, showing Mohammed surrounded by police and paramedics wearing blue plastic gloves. He is lying face down, barefoot, not moving and apparently unconscious and appears to have his hands cuffed behind his back.

At one point, the person filming the incident is heard saying that they think Mohammed has been unconscious for some time. The person is then asked by the police to move away and stop filming, to which this person replies, "Given your history, the history of the police with black people, I should be filming, and

everyone should be filming."

The police officer replies, referring to Mohammed, "It's not really fair, is it? He's not asking you to, is he?" The person filming agrees to move further away and replies, "He looks unconscious to me."

The *Daily Mirror* reported, "At least six police cars were at the scene, along with police dogs."

Deborah Coles, director of Inquest, a charity that focuses on deaths in custody (police, prison, immigration detention and deaths of detained patients) said, "This death of a vulnerable black teenager has rightly raised significant public concern and disquiet. It has been deeply distressing for the family to see images of Mzee still in handcuffs, being held down by police when he appeared to be unconscious. There must be the most robust investigation into the conduct of the security staff, police and paramedics involved in this tragic death."

Mohammed's death is being investigated by the Independent Police Complaint Commission (IPCC), a toothless body.

The death has sparked outrage in the Toxteth and Kensington areas of Liverpool, where Mzee had links. Last Saturday his mother, Karla, and sister, Melissa, led a group of 300 people from the main Lime Street train station to the shopping centre, chanting, "Justice for Mzee!" The protest included supporters of the Black Lives Matter organisation.

At Lime Street, Karla paid tribute to her son and made criticisms of Merseyside Police. She said to demonstrators, "I will not rest, I will walk in my son's shoes until I get answers, and anyone who had a hand in my boy's death will be brought to justice. My son will not be a number or a statistic. His death will not be in vain."

She pointed out that her son had no pre-existing

medical conditions.

A protest against Mohammed's death was also held in London. One of those attending the London protest was Marcia Rigg. Her brother, Sean, a fit and healthy 40-year-old, died following a cardiac arrest while in police custody on August 21, 2008. Speaking about the mobile phone footage of Mohammed, she said, "I was alarmed that he [Mohammed] appears to be fully unconscious, but his handcuffs haven't been removed. How can you bring someone medical attention when they're in handcuffs?"

According to Inquest, Mzee Mohammed is the ninth person to die in police custody this year. Between 1990 and 2016, there were 1,028 deaths in police custody in England and Wales. When all contact with the police is taken into account, including police pursuits and shootings, the figure rises to 1,561. To this day not a single police officer has been successfully prosecuted for any of these deaths.



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