Notes on police violence

NYPD shoot, kill man holding screwdriver

Kevin Martinez
17 January 2017

Police in the Springfield Gardens section of Queens, New York killed Jahlire Nicholson Friday after he allegedly threatened his mother with a screwdriver.

Nicholson was the third person killed by the NYPD in less than two weeks. Nine people were fatally shot by the NYPD in all of 2016.

The shooting was the fourth police-involved shooting in New York City so far this year, with three people shot by police in a span of 36 hours in the first week of January.

According to the police, officers responded to reports of screaming around 3 a.m. last Saturday after a neighbor told 911 they could hear the mother screaming, “He’s going to kill me.”

NYPD Chief of Patrol Terence Monahan told news media that officers found the 28-year-old man in a stairwell threatening his mother with a screwdriver.

According to police, a struggle followed, with Nicholson’s mother breaking free, allowing officers to attempt to use a stun gun on him, but missing the target. Monahan said each officer fired a single round at Nicholson, killing him. He was taken to Jamaica Hospital where he was pronounced dead. The mother was unharmed.

Neighbors told CBS2 news that they saw a man believed to be Nicholson an hour earlier in the day in an agitated state. Miles Douglas told media, “Yelling, cussing, he was carrying on. We thought it was (directed at) his girlfriend, but it obviously was his mother.”

Sources told news media that police had been called to the mother’s house several times in recent years for reports of fighting.

San Diego police cleared of wrongdoing in shooting death of Alfred Olango

Richard Gonsalves, the San Diego police officer who last year shot and killed Alfred Olango, an unarmed immigrant from Uganda, will not face criminal charges.

San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis announced at a press conference last week that the shooting, along with five other shootings involving San Diego police officers last year, was justified.

In announcing and excusing the other shootings, two of which were not caught on camera, Dumanis and others sought to minimize the public outcry over the shooting of Olango.

According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, only six officers have been prosecuted “in the hundreds of shootings in the county since 1980.”

Olango was shot and killed on September 27, 2016 after “acting erratically” and walking into traffic in the working class suburb of El Cajon. His killer, Gonsalves, fired four shots at him within one minute of exiting his police car. The shooting was captured on a bystander’s cellphone and a taco shop’s security camera.

Authorities slowed down the video at the press conference to single out the image where it appears that Olango was in a “shooting stance” and aimed a shiny object at the officer. The object later turned out to be a vaping device.

Dumanis nevertheless declared at the press conference, “The law recognizes police officers are often forced to make split-second decisions in circumstances that are tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving.

“As prosecutors we have an ethical duty to follow the

© World Socialist Web Site

law and only charge individuals when we have proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The only reasonable conclusion was the officer's actions were justified," Dumanis concluded.

The footage was only released to the public after several days of angry protests and marches, some of which saw clashes with the police who were equipped with paramilitary gear and fired rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades at the largely peaceful crowds.

Police officials have made much of the fact that Olango had a previous criminal record and was intoxicated at the time of his death. They have also insisted that Gonsalves was following police protocol when he confronted Olango and shot him.

Olango's sister Lucy has since testified that her brother Alfred was suffering from a mental breakdown following the recent death of a close friend. According to her, he had not slept for two days when he arrived at his sister's house in a state of panic and paranoia. She had called 911 and asked the dispatcher to take him to a mental health facility. She specifically told them that he was unarmed.

Despite her calls for help, no one arrived and she and Olango left her home separately. On her way to work, she saw her brother walking in and out of traffic and called 911 again. She called a third time 17 minutes later. This time Gonsalves and officer Josh McDaniel approached Olango in front of a taco shop.

According to investigators, the officers had not been told by 911 dispatchers that he was unarmed but were told that he was mentally distressed.

The videos clearly show that Gonsalves and McDaniel cornered Olango and rapidly escalated the situation. Gonsalves removed his gun from its holster within seconds, while McDaniel pointed a Taser at Olango. Olango then pulled the vape pen out of his pocket and raised it towards the officers, prompting Gonsalves to shoot, killing him with four bullets.

In a letter to the El Cajon chief of police, Dumanis wrote, "It appears Olango's actions in bringing up his hands in this manner, with the vaping device, was a purposeful, intentional act by Olango to place Gonsalves in fear that he was about to be shot."

The Olango family has filed wrongful death lawsuits against the city, with a federal civil rights lawsuit "imminent" according to an attorney representing the family. Attorney Brian Dunn told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, "This is not in any way going to diminish our resolve to seek justice for the family through the civil justice system and the reforms that will work to ensure that this type of homicide does not occur in the future."

Attorney Dan Gilleon, who represents Olango's sister, and an El Cajon officer who has sued Gonsalves for sexual harassment, said the officer "escalated a situation that should have been de-escalated," adding, "He provoked and terrified a man he knew was having a mental breakdown."

Alfred Olango's father, Richard Olango Abuka, told reporters that he and others would seek justice, using "all the tactics we need until the last man is gunned down." He said he was prepared to use "guerrilla tactics, but a guerrilla can fight without guns."

Abuka criticized the police for failing to follow minimal procedures saying, "When they arrived, the police officer did not assess the situation. In nine seconds, he killed my son. He did not assess anything."

Abuka brought up the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and said, "If Martin Luther King Jr. was alive today, I think he would start another revolution."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site