

Australian woman fatally shot by Minneapolis police officer

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Late Saturday night, two Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers responded to a 911 call from 40-year-old Justine Ruszcyk, an Australian woman who reported what she thought was a sexual assault in an alleyway in her neighborhood.

Soon after they arrived on the scene, one of the two officers discharged his weapon more than once, fatally shooting Ruszcyk, who used the last name of her soon-to-be husband, Don Damond. The Hennepin County Medical Examiner reported Monday night that Damond was killed by a gunshot to the abdomen, ruling her death a homicide.

The officer, who has been identified as Mohamed Noor, the first Somali-American police officer to patrol the district, reportedly shot Damond from the passenger seat of the police car through the driver's door as Damond spoke to his partner, 25-year-old Matthew Harity.

Following the pattern of other police killings, Noor and Harity have been placed on paid administrative leave until the ongoing investigation is completed.

According to officials investigating the shooting, there is no dashcam video of the incident, and, while the officers wore the body cameras required by state law, they both had them turned off.

Police officers in Minneapolis are required to wear body cameras as part of an effort to mitigate popular outrage in the aftermath of the July 2016 shooting of Philando Castile. While this decision was presented as a progressive police reform by the Democratic Party and its supporters, the Damond shooting has exposed it as purely cosmetic. Officers can easily conceal their actions by simply leaving their body cameras turned off.

Saturday's shooting took place in a relatively low crime, middle-class neighborhood in Southwest

Minneapolis.

Friends and family of Damond held a vigil Sunday night near the alleyway to express their anger over her killing. Don Damond, Justine's fiancé, said that her loved ones and friends were "desperate for answers."

"Piecing together Justine's last moments before the homicide would be a small comfort as we grieve this tragedy," he told reporters at a briefing.

Zach Damond spoke out after the death of his soon-to-be step-mother in a widely shared video on Facebook. "My mom is dead because a police officer shot her for reasons I don't know, and I demand answers." He continued, expressing his opposition to police violence in America, "I'm so done with all of this violence. It's bullshit—America sucks. These cops need to get trained differently."

Minneapolis Police Chief Janeé Harteau, delivering the typical empty gestures, said that the department had called for "an external and independent investigation into the officer-involved shooting death." In 2015, Harteau made similar promises about the cops who brutally shot and killed Jamar Clarke execution-style, and the investigation ended with no charges filed.

News of Damond's death has already made front-page headlines in Australia. Matt Omo, a friend of Damond's from Australia told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "How someone teaching meditation and spreading love can be shot dead by police while in her pajamas is beyond comprehension."

Damond, who was white, is the sixth person fatally shot by police in Minnesota this year, and one of at least 662 people killed nationwide, with fatal shootings occurring in all but two of the fifty states. Her killing is a graphic reminder that the issue of police brutality is not fundamentally a racial issue, as it is presented in the media and by organizations like Black Lives Matter.

While racism may play a role in certain incidents of police violence, leading to a disproportionate number of African American victims, men and women of all races and ethnicities are targets of police violence.

According to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*, 543 people have been shot and killed by the police this year. Broken down by racial categories, where they could be identified, whites make up the largest number with 233 dead, followed by African-Americans at 121 and Hispanics at 88. The victims are overwhelmingly working class or poor.

The ruling class in the United States confronts an increasingly hostile population and has encouraged the police to use deadly force with legal impunity. Just last week, Jeronimo Yanez, the officer who was acquitted in the fatal shooting of Philando Castile, signed an agreement for a \$48,500 severance bonus.

The Obama administration routinely intervened on the side of the police in every case that came before the Supreme Court, and worked closely with Democratic mayors and governors to suppress the popular protests against police violence that followed the 2014 murder of Michael Brown.

The most reactionary elements within the police have been encouraged by the Trump administration's Justice Department, which has rolled back even the pretense of oversight put in place by the Obama administration. Police shootings are on track this year to match the nearly 1,000 killings in 2016.



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