

Grief and questions after UK police kill unarmed Black man

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Black Lives Matter protesters observe one minute of silence in front of New Scotland Yard building in central London demanding justice for 24 year old Chris Kaba, who was shot dead by the police last week, London, UK, September 10 [Maja Smiejkowska/Reuters]

London, September 15 (RHC)-- The police killing of a Black man – 24-year-old father and aspiring rapper Chris Kaba – has reignited a national conversation about racism within the British police force and stirred fears among the country's Black communities.

On September 5, at about 10pm, Kaba was fatally shot by police after a car chase in Streatham Hill, a south London district.

He was boxed in and an officer shot through the windshield of the Audi he was driving, on the driver's side. He received first aid at the scene and was taken to hospital, where he died.

London's Metropolitan Police, which after the 2020 death of George Floyd committed to becoming an actively anti-racist organization, said Kaba's car had been stopped after his registration number was "linked to a firearms offence in the previous days."

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) said no gun was found in the car or the surrounding area and that the car, flagged by an automated system as carrying a weapon, was not owned by Kaba.

Kaba's family said in a statement released to Inquest, a charity that focuses on state-related deaths: "We are devastated; we need answers and we need accountability. We are worried that if Chris had not been Black, he would have been arrested on Monday evening and not had his life cut short."

The family, who say they were not informed of Kaba's death for 11 hours, have also asked for the bodycam footage of the officers to be released.

Black Lives Matter UK told Al Jazeera by email that the killing of Kaba, also known as Mad Itch from the London drill music group 67, was even more shocking since it followed the death of Oladeji Adeyemi Omishore, a 41-year-old man who jumped off a London bridge after being Tasered by police on June 4.

"With each death, our community experiences collective grief. Black people across the UK are left wondering: Who's next? And how can justice and accountability be achieved?" According to official figures, Black people are far more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than any other ethnic group, while those aged 16 to 24 have the lowest rate of confidence in their local police services.

The national police force is 93 percent white, while Black officers make up 1.3 percent. In comparison, 86 percent of the population is white, while 3.3 percent is Black.

"We are twice as likely to die in or following police contact," said Black Lives Matter UK. "We have decades' worth of evidence that the police and criminal justice system is guilty of institutional racism."

Tobi Oredein, the founder of Black Ballad, an online magazine for Black women, wrote in a newsletter: "This country has remained virtually silent on Chris Kaba's death and it is not right. I know some will argue that Queen Elizabeth has died so that is the main headline.

"It is both fascinating and terrifying (more terrifying) that this country has all the time for a woman who lived a full life of 96 years and whose power and wealth come from privilege, racism and colonialism, but doesn't give a damn about a 24 year-old whose life was ripped away from him by the very people who should uphold the law. As I said, this country doesn't give a damn about Black lives."

Over the weekend, anti-racism protesters took to the streets of London demanding justice for Kaba and his family.

Stormzy, Britain's most well-known rapper, spoke at the rally: "When these people do these things, they get away with it, because what happens is we do this once, we get tired, we tweet, we get tired, we do it for a week, we do it for two weeks, we do it for a month, and they know we get tired.

"What they've done is they've killed someone. We can't sugarcoat it," he added, stressing the need for stamina as an investigation continues.

The IOPC has launched a homicide investigation following its review of evidence. Its probe continues as a criminal investigation, but it has cautioned that “this does not mean that criminal charges will necessarily follow”.

In a video statement, Met Police commander Alexis Boon offered “heartfelt condolences to the family of Chris Kaba.” “The community are hurt, and there is trauma. I have officers out there patrolling, engaging with the public, talking to the community,” he said. “I would like to reassure the community that the Met is cooperating fully with the IOPC as they carry out a thorough and independent investigation.”

There had been demands – joined by South London MPs Bell Ribeiro-Addy and Harriet Harman – for the Met officer who fired the shot to be suspended. This past Monday, the Telegraph reported that the officer in question had been pulled from front-line duty.

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