

## Deaths in custody

There have been over 3000 deaths in police custody since 1969. Research and data conducted by INQUEST<sup>1</sup> has shown that there is a pattern of institutionalised reluctance to approach deaths in custody as potential murders, even where systematic failings and gross negligence have occurred.

Deaths in custody applies to all deaths in state detention including prisons, secure training centres, in police custody, immigration detention centres and psychiatric detention and those involving contact with state agents. Despite evidence of unreasonable force / misuse of power, not one state officer has been tried and found guilty of unlawful killing.

## United Families and Friends

The United Families and Friends (UFFC) is a grassroots organisation seeking justice for the families of those who have died when held in police custody. Established in 1997 as a support network for black families, the campaign group has now grown to include families and friends of all those (irrespective of race) who have also died in police custody.

The families of the deceased have also reported barriers by the state in seeking justice. As the table below clearly shows the substantial inequalities being faced between families seeking justice and the state.

The state	Barriers experienced by family members'	
Officers of the state very often are able to continue working	Intrusive assessment where the deceased family (and their siblings and partners) are included in the application process for legal aid.	Very often being denied access to legal aid – there is no automatic right to non-means tested public funds for families.
Have the use of the media to prepare their defence	Suffering the indignity and injustice of former police officers being part of the investigation process.	Being demonised by the media and police including being monitored – (Stephen Lawrence Family)
Automatic access to public funds for their defence / institutions of detention will be legally represented by experienced and well-qualified lawyers at unlimited public expense.	Being given misinformation about their deaths of their loved ones	Refusal to get access to the body of the deceased – families often report that the body 'belongs to the state'.
	Being / feeling criminalised (despite having committed no crime) and re-suffering the trauma	Not being given any access to specialist counselling for families
	Excessive wait to see CCTV evidence / transcripts of footage	

<sup>1</sup> INQUEST ([www.inquest.org.uk](http://www.inquest.org.uk)) is a small charitable organisation providing support to bereaved families and services to MPs, the media and lawyers on the issue of deaths in custody.

As part of their campaign, UFFC calls for:

1. Prison deaths to be subject to a system of properly funded investigation that is completely independent of the Prison Service;
2. Officers involved in custody deaths be suspended until investigations are completed;
3. Prosecutions should automatically follow 'unlawful killing' verdicts;
4. Police forces be made accountable to the communities they serve;
5. Legal Aid and full disclosure of information is available to the relatives of victims;
6. Officers responsible for deaths should face criminal charges, even if retired

In May 2014, the following motion was passed at UCU Congress:

***Resolution 69 – Black deaths in custody***

*Congress deplores the continuing deaths of black people in prison and police custody, in young offenders' institutions during arrest or detention under the Mental Health Act. Congress believes that it is not acceptable for police and prison officers to be unaccountable to the communities that they serve.*

*Deaths in custody are an issue of concern for all trade unionists - because what happens in Tottenham or Luton or Winson Green today can happen to any one of us tomorrow.*

*Congress agrees to:*

- *Campaign to ensure that police and prison officers wear cameras at all times when making an arrest and/or restraining suspects*
- *Campaign to ensure that close family members are informed immediately after someone has been arrested and/or detained*
- *Affiliate to the United Family and Friends Campaign and support the annual procession of remembrance*
- *Circulate campaign calls and information from UFFC to all UCU members.*

The Institute of Race Relations have published their report ***Dying for Justice*** which gives the background on 509 people (an average of 22 per year) from BAME, refugee and migrant communities who have died between 1991 – 2014 in suspicious circumstances in which the police, prison authorities or immigration detention officers have been implicated.

Click [here](#) to download the full report.

**UCU is encouraging members to support the Annual Protest March against Deaths in Custody held every October and supports this initiative to raise the unfairness and lack of accountability and transparency for the families.**