



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 3, 2014

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY AT MT. SINAI
UNITED CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON STATEN ISLAND**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: We've just come from a meeting of clergy, and elected officials, and community leaders here in Staten Island. And there's a lot of pain and frustration in the room this evening.

And, at the same time, a lot of purposefulness. Everyone here, having spent so much of their lives trying to address some of the divisions that afflict us – in particular, our brothers and sisters who are members of the clergy, having devoted themselves to comforting and supporting people in all sorts of situations. Yet, tonight, there was a particular sense of challenge, and of pain.

I want to thank everyone who gathered together, in common purpose. I want to thank Bishop Brown for hosting us, for his leadership. I want to thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Public Advocate Tish James. I want to thank Borough President Jimmy Oddo. I want to offer a special thank you to Council Member Debi Rose, who has been in the center of so much of what's happened in these last months, to help people understand what we have to do together to move forward, but also to listen, and absorb the pain and the frustration so many people have faced. I know it has not been easy, council member, but I want to thank you for your profound leadership.

And to so many of the clergy that you worked with, who have been such important partners in reminding people we have to find a way forward. And we have to find a way forward together, by definition.

It's a very emotional day for our city. It's a very painful day for so many New Yorkers. That is the core reality. So many people in this city are feeling pain right now. And we're grieving, again, over the loss of Eric Garner, who was a father, a husband, a son, a good man – a man who should be with us, and isn't. That pain, that simple fact, is felt again so sharply today.

I spent some time with Ben Garner, Eric's father, who is in unspeakable pain. And it's a very hard thing to spend time trying to comfort someone you know is beyond the reach of comfort because of what he's been through. I can only imagine. I couldn't help but immediately think what it would mean to me to lose Dante. Life could never be the same thereafter, and I could feel how it will never be whole again – things will never be whole again for Mr. Garner. And even in the midst of his pain, one of the things he stopped and said so squarely was, there can't be violence. He said Eric would not have wanted violence, violence won't get us anywhere. He was so sharp and clear in his desire, despite his pain. I found it noble. I could only imagine what it took for him to summon that. No family should have to go through what the Garner family went through.

And the tragedy is personal to this family, but it's become something personal to so many of us. It's put in stark perspective the relationship between police and community. This issue has come to the fore again, and we have

to address them with all our might. We can't stop. We have to act, with the assumption that it's all of our jobs to never have a tragedy again – that's what we have to fight for.

This is profoundly personal for me. I was at the White House the other day, and the President of the United States turned to me, and he met Dante a few months ago, and he said that Dante reminded him of what he looked like as a teenager. And he said, I know you see this crisis through a very personal lens. I said to him I did. Because Chirlane and I have had to talk to Dante for years, about the dangers he may face. A good young man, a law-abiding young man, who would never think to do anything wrong, and yet, because of a history that still hangs over us, the dangers he may face – we've had to literally train him, as families have all over this city for decades, in how to take special care in any encounter he has with the police officers who are there to protect him.

And that painful sense of contradiction that our young people see first – that our police are here to protect us, and we honor that, and at the same time, there's a history we have to overcome, because for so many of our young people, there's a fear. And for so many of our families, there's a fear. So I've had to worry, over the years, Chirlane's had to worry – was Dante safe each night? There are so many families in this city who feel that each and every night – is my child safe? And not just from some of the painful realities – crime and violence in some of our neighborhoods – but are they safe from the very people they want to have faith in as their protectors? That's the reality. And it conforms to something bigger that you've heard come out in the protests in Ferguson, and all over the country.

This is now a national moment of grief, a national moment of pain, and searching for a solution, and you've heard in so many places, people of all backgrounds, utter the same basic phrase. They've said "Black Lives Matter." And they said it because it had to be said. It's a phrase that should never have to be said – it should be self-evident. But our history, sadly, requires us to say that Black Lives Matter. Because, as I said the other day, we're not just dealing with a problem in 2014, we're not dealing with years of racism leading up to it, or decades of racism – we are dealing with centuries of racism that have brought us to this day. That is how profound the crisis is. And that is how fundamental the task at hand is, to turn from that history and to make a change that is profound and lasting.

In the here and now, so many New Yorkers will ask the question, what will happen next? They'll ask, will there be a full airing of these facts? Will there be some investigation that means something to them? And I think the truth is important here.

One chapter has closed, with the decision of this grand jury. There are more chapters ahead. The police department will initiate now its own investigation, and make its own decisions about the administrative actions it can take. The federal government is clearly engaged and poised to act. Just before the meeting began with the leaders here on Staten Island, I received a phone call from the United States Attorney General Eric Holder, and from U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch. They made clear that the investigation initiated by the U.S. Attorney would now move forward, that it would be done expeditiously, that it would be done with a clear sense of independence, and that it would be a thorough investigation. It was a palpable sense of resolve – the federal government will exercise its responsibilities here, and do a full and thorough investigation, and draw conclusions accordingly.

We've experienced one challenge after another in these last weeks. The events of Ferguson may have most sharply framed this discussion nationally. For all of us here, what's happened in our own community is what we feel most deeply. It was hard for any one of us, as a human being, and particularly any of us who is a parent, to not be deeply pained by the death of Tamir Rice in Cleveland – a 12-year-old boy – something that's very, very hard to fathom. And all of these pains add up and demand of us action. It is powerful, even in the midst of the pain, that our President is acting. It is powerful that our President is focusing on changing our approach to policing, to focus on community policing, focus on the value of body cameras as a new tool for accountability and transparency. It's powerful that our Attorney General is focused.

These things will matter. These things will lead to change. Here in this city, change is happening. Even in this moment, people are feeling pain and frustration and confusion. Change is happening right now and I said in the meeting change is happening because the people willed it to happen. We're leaders, we all strive to serve and help our people, but the people willed this change to happen. The people believed the broken policy of stop and frisk had to end and it has ended. The people believed there were too many young people of color arrested and saddled with a record for the rest of their lives simply for the possession of a small amount of marijuana and that policy has been changed. The people demanded something different. It's my responsibility and responsibility to everyone standing here with me to achieve that on behalf of the people.

When I named Commissioner Bratton as our Police Commissioner, I knew him to be – I knew it at the time and I've seen it even more since – I knew him to be one of the greatest reformers and change agents in policing in the history of this country. I have seen that ability and those values play out each and every day.

I saw it today at the New York City Police Department Academy where not only did we talk about what body cameras will mean in terms of changing the relationship between the police and community, we talked about the re-training of the entire police force, something that has never been done in this city before. We talked about helping our officers understand the different ways to diffuse confrontations. We talked about bringing our officers closer to the community from the point of their training, from the first moments of their experience as law enforcement officers, emphasizing the partnership they needed with the community.

And I remind you, my faith in Commissioner Bratton is based on the actions he has taken over decades and it is also based on the clarity of his message to all of us. He gathered his top commanders a few weeks ago. It was well-reported. He said very publicly, the department will act aggressively to ensure any officer who is not meant to be in this work no longer is. He talked about those who don't live up to the values of the uniform, who have "brutal", who are "corrupt", who are "racist", who are "incompetent". This was our police commissioner making clear his standard that people who sadly fit those descriptions would not be members of the NYPD.

These changes will matter. They will affect millions of people. They will take time, but that is not in any way an excuse or an unwillingness on our part to do anything but the fastest change we can. It's an honest leveling with our people that not every change can happen overnight, but they're happening resolutely and forcefully, more happening every day. Each change builds upon the next. There is a momentum for change that will be felt in every neighborhood in this city.

And, again, it doesn't come first and foremost, from City Hall, or from One Police Plaza, it comes from the people of this city who have demanded it. This change is about the values of our people, the will of our people, the goodness of our people. That's where change comes from. And everyone has an opportunity to play a role in that change by continuing to work for it. And that is across every community.

I have to emphasize, and we've seen this all over the country, but I know it's true here, and I have an experience from last year that I think is evidence. This is not just a demand coming from the African American community. It's not just a demand coming from the Latino community. It's coming from every community. It's coming from people from all faiths who want a city of fairness, who want violence to end, who want no family to go through the tragedy the Garners did.

So, people will express themselves now, as they should in a democracy. I ask everyone to listen to what Ben Garner said and what Eric Garner's son said as well – if you really want a dignified life of Eric Garner, you will do so through peaceful protest. You will work relentlessly for change. You will not sully his name with violence or vandalism. That doesn't bring us closer to a better community. The only thing that has ever worked is peaceful protest. Non-violent social activism is the only thing that has ever worked.

And the Garner family has made the abundantly clear. Michael Brown's family made that abundantly clear. People should listen to those we say we stand in solidarity with, fulfill their wishes and work for change the right way.

I'll just finish with a couple more points and then I want to say something in Spanish before I depart.

So many of us steeped in the teachings of Dr. King, there are many great leaders, but perhaps no one more definitional in the work of social change and the work of justice than Dr. King and he said something so fundamental that should remind us how we need to handle this moment. He said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This is a problem for all New Yorkers. This is a problem for all Americans. It has to be treated as such.

Anyone who says to you this is a problem only felt by people of color or only pertinent to young people and this is what's going on here. It's all our problem – and anyone who believes in the values of this country should feel called to action right now. Anyone who cares about justice, that American value of justice, should understand it is a moment that change must happen. Change is as good as the people that we represent.

Just want to say in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

We have a lot of work to do together. I want to thank all of my colleagues who have been working so hard here in the neighborhoods of Staten Island and so many all over the city. Their work matters. Their work is being felt. It will continue to be felt as we continue the work of change and reform. I want to thank again Bishop Brown for bringing us together. I want to thank all of the leaders here today. I'll turn to Bishop Brown and Speaker Mark-Viverito and Public Advocate James and they'll continue talking to you.

I want to thank you, everyone, for this chance to talk about this moment that we're all facing together. And we will address our problems in this city together. Thank you.

###