

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

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STATEMENT DURING POLICE WEEK 2015, BY BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE CHIEF JIM JOHNSON, CHAIR, NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE, ON HONORING FALLEN OFFICERS AND PROTECTING THE PROTECTORS



Every minute of every day law enforcement officers put their own lives on the line while working to protect the public. This week, during Police Week, we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice, as law enforcement officers from around the nation gather to pay tribute to those killed in the line of duty.



As we honor all our fallen heroes, we continue to collectively grieve the tragic loss of two Hattiesburg, Mississippi, police officers, Benjamin Deen, 34, and Liquori Tate, 24, who were shot and killed on Saturday, May 9 during a traffic stop. We send our deepest condolences to their families, and to all those whose loved ones sacrificed their own lives while protecting others.



This is a very solemn time. It is also an important time to reflect on the nature and level of danger that our men and women in blue face every day as they work to protect the public.



Firearms in dangerous hands are killing too many of our citizens and, as we have just seen with the shooting deaths of Hattiesburg Officers Deen and Tate, law enforcement officers are increasingly being gunned down by those intent on doing us harm.

Here are some of the disturbing facts:



- There was a 56% rise in firearm fatalities among law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in 2014, over the previous year, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

- Gunfire was the leading cause of officer line of duty deaths in 2014, as it was in 2011 when gun deaths outpaced all other causes for the first time in 14 years.

- Ambushes involving guns were a leading cause of officer deaths in 2014 and the number one cause in 2013 and 2012.

- Firearms were responsible for 93 percent of homicides of law enforcement officers between 1996 and 2010, according to a 2013 Johns Hopkins study. Gun deaths among all Americans have been on the rise over the last decade, going from an average of 82 per day in 2002, to 91 a day in 2012 -- the last year for which data is publicly available.



- Active shooter incidents have also risen, according to an FBI report, with active shooter incidents increasing from 6.4 per year from 2000 to 2006, to 16.4 per year from 2007 to 2013.

As we mourn the loss of our heroic colleagues, it is critical that we do all we can to protect others from the same fate. This nation must come together and support measures to keep guns from criminals and others too dangerous to possess them.

While we require background checks for firearm purchases made through federally licensed gun dealers, criminals, domestic abusers, those with mental health disqualifiers, and illegal gun traffickers have no impediments to accessing firearms through private sales where no checks are required. There have been public warnings that terrorists are encouraging sympathizers to target law enforcement, but no action has yet been taken to shut off the free-flowing supply of guns to those who are barred from possessing them.

Enough is enough. It is time to stop the unfettered access and flow of guns to those intent on doing harm. Our fallen heroes courageously did their jobs. It is time for policymakers to exhibit courage and do theirs. All of our lives are in their hands.

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