



## PRESS STATEMENT

Apia, 5 June 2020 – *Q+A with the Samoa Observer regarding George Floyd and relevance to Samoa*

**Q: As you may be aware there has been a spark of riots in America in light of the incident in Minneapolis on George Floyd. Can you comment on how the incident in the U.S. is relevant to Samoa?**

This tragic incident shows how an abuse of power and authority and discrimination based on race can impact and lead to grave injustice and violation of basic fundamental rights – the right to life, freedom from inhumane treatment particularly when the situation did not seem to require the attention and force it was used.

It is a situation that can happen anywhere in the world and no doubt in many other places but is not widely reported.

Samoans do not need to look to the US to see evidence of systemic discrimination and abuse of power by those in positions. As a small nation, racial discrimination is not as visible but that does not mean that it does not exist in Samoa. We have had situations of discrimination based on status, nationality, gender, religion, ability, etc. and as a nation, there are things that we can do to stamp out discrimination. We can start with the proper use of language to describe people (eg. tama uli/tagata uli when referring to black persons as opposed to 'meauli') and ensuring our actions do not encroach on the rights of another.

We are fortunate and proud that in our country, our faa-Samoa principles of faaaloalo and ava fatafata often override anger and frustration as the only protests we have ever seen have been through peaceful means. Sadly in the US, the situation has gone beyond that to riots, damaging personal properties and breaking the law. We are to be reminded of the value of our freedom to express our opinion via protests but this must be done in accordance with the law to uphold peace.

Responding to violence with violence further breeds more violence, hate, and division.

As a small nation founded on Christian principles let us never lose sight of our shared humanity at any point regardless of our status and position in society.

**Q: What are your views about the incident of George Floyd and how can it be addressed to avoid violence?**

There must be concrete steps to immediately address the injustice which led to the violence, to begin with, and that means in this case for their Police to publicly front up and take responsibility of their actions firstly dealing with the officers that were involved and publicly reassured the public of their stance to zero tolerance on discrimination and unnecessary use of excessive force, etc.

**Q: There have been previous cases in Samoa where several members of the public have filed complaints with the Ombudsman's office because of treatment from law enforcers. Why is it important for Samoa's enforcement officers to carry out their work in accordance with the law and at the same time consider the rights of those being accused?**

The Office places great importance on the responsibilities and functions of law enforcement officers in Samoa. Their role is vital to the good functioning of our democratic nation and the protection of human rights. Law Enforcement Officers are being entrusted with powers of State to enforce its law and with such powers come greater responsibility and a higher level of accountability. Police Officers are still subject to the law and are bound by strict professional standards that are overseen internally by the Professional Standards Unit and externally by the Ombudsman Office.

The Office and the Ministry of Police have a partnership that has been ongoing for the last 5 years undertaking human rights training with officers. The purpose is to strengthen and support the compliance of officers of national laws and international human rights standards to ensure that officers develop an attitude of respect and value for human rights in carrying out their roles in their respective work.

**Q: Can you give us a background on how many complaints filed by members of the public with the Ombudsman's office concerning law enforcement officers?**

So far, the Special Investigations Unit has received 8 complaints against law enforcement officers this year for unreasonable delay in the investigation of reported offences, discrimination, and a general lack of professionalism when responding to reported offences.

There have been claims of Police brutality in the past but not to the extent of the unfortunate circumstances that led to George Floyd's death. Consistent internal and external oversight on Police activity has proven to be an effective way of curbing the unlawful use of powers bestowed on law enforcement. This allows the Office to make recommendations that assist the Police in making responsible administrative decisions that are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the people. A number of Ombudsman investigations have also been pursued on its own motion based on trending systemic issues in the Police and matters that are aired on different media platforms.

The Ombudsman therefore continues to encourage the public to report any incidents of abuse of power.

We encourage the public to report any incidents of police brutality or abuse of power whenever they encounter and experience these situations to the Professional Standard Unit of the Ministry Police on 22222 or to the Ombudsman Office on 25394 or contact us via email on [complaints@ombudsman.gov.ws](mailto:complaints@ombudsman.gov.ws)

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