



October 30, 2018

Attorney General Sessions
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

As leaders of the civil rights organizations listed below, we write in response to the recent horrific hate crimes that occurred last week. Just this past Saturday, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh was the victim of a shooting during Sabbath services which left 11 worshippers dead. This anti-Semitic attack followed a week in which frequent, prominent leaders who were critics of President Trump were victims of multiple attempted bombing attacks by an alleged supporter of the President. Just a few days ago, an armed gunman tried to enter an African-American church in Kentucky, just before killing two separate Black grandparents in a Kroger parking lot. Earlier this month, members of the “Proud Boys” led a violent assault on protesters in New York City while shouting bigoted slurs.

These incidents are the latest in the wave of hate crimes that have increased exponentially over the last two years across the United States. Indeed, in its annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, the Anti-Defamation League reports a 60 percent surge in hate crimes since 2017.¹ The Southern Poverty Law Center found that the number of hate groups in the United States in 2017 rose to 953 from 912 in 2016.² We raised the issue of hate crimes with you directly during an in-person meeting in March 2017 at your offices.

These incidents are all too familiar to the African-American community which has been the target of hate-related crimes throughout United States history. These recent incidents follow a series of hate-related killings over the past two years:

- The murder of Timothy Caughman in New York City, an African-American man, by James Harris Jackson who Caughman encountered on the street. Mr. Jackson, a self-described white supremacist, took responsibility for the stabbing death and admitted his hatred of African-American men and said that he traveled to New York City from his home in Baltimore with the intent to murder them.

¹ <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/2017-audit-of-anti-semitic-incidents>.

² <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

- The murder of Srinivas Kuchibhotla, shot in Kansas by an individual who preceded the violence by directing racial slurs at Mr. Kuchibholta and suggesting he did not belong in the United States.
- The investigation and arrest of a South Carolina man who sought to conduct an attack similar to Dylann Roof who slaughtered nine African-American worshippers at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston in 2015.

The unspeakable violence of Mr. Roof's attack, as well as the massacre of six Sikh worshippers at a temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012, continues to resonate with devastating clarity in our communities. These incidents reflect a legacy of racist violence targeting Americans based on race, religion, and ethnicity.

To date, you have failed to announce a comprehensive plan to address the rise in hate crimes across our country. Indeed, your silence on this issue has been most alarming, even as you have traveled across the country announcing new initiatives and resources to combat MS-13 gangs and gun violence in Chicago.

As the Attorney General, you are empowered to enforce the nation's civil rights laws. In this role, you are expected to demonstrate leadership in protecting the civil rights of those who are victimized based on their racial, ethnic, religious, gender or sexual identity.

As civil rights leaders, we call on DOJ to vigorously enforce the federal prohibition against hate crimes by appropriately charging hate crimes under 18 U.S.C. 249. More importantly, we call on you to publicly release a comprehensive plan for addressing the rise of hate crimes including plans for preventing these incidents proactively and systemically, including convening and leading an interagency task force to examine and investigate these incidents and develop a strategy to combat them and coordinating federal law enforcement agency efforts in this area going forward. As part of this plan, we call on you to include an investigation of the extent to which members of hate groups have infiltrated federal and local law enforcement departments, and whether organizations like the "Proud Boys" have formed relationships with local law enforcement departments that receive federal funds.

Finally, we note that under federal law, the Tree of Life synagogue murders and the mailing of pipe bombs may constitute acts of domestic terrorism. 18 U.S.C. 2331(5). As such, we are calling on DOJ and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to vigorously investigate these incidents as terrorism.

In sum, we encourage you to speak clearly and forcefully against hate crimes and to use the full powers of your office to confront and prosecute violent white supremacists. We also urge you as the Attorney General to condemn political rhetoric which may encourage acts of criminal violence that violate our civil rights laws. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you.

Sincerely,

Melanie Campbell, President and CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation

Kristen Clarke, President and Executive Director, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Derrick Johnson, President and CEO, NAACP

Marc Morial, President, National Urban League

Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President, National Action Network