

DOREEN LAWRENCE's VOICE

"I would like to start off by thanking the United Nations and the High Commissioner for inviting me to take part in the Durban Review Conference Geneva 2009. I was one of those who attended the Conference in 2001 but I was not given the opportunity to be one of the voices. I would like to say that I saw the fault lie at the door of my Government.

In 2001, the British Government was in a position of saying that they had initiated and carried out a Public Inquiry into the racist killing of my son and what lessons could be learnt. This should be something that they should be proud of (I attended at the invitation of Amnesty International in 2001).

Before the death of my son I was wearing rose tinted glasses, but since then my eyes are open as to the suffering of our black people in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. Divide and rule is what the politician is trying to do with people from the black community.

On the 22nd April 1993 I returned from a field trip that I had attended as a student as part of my course with a London University. Stephen, being the eldest of three children and at the age of 18 years old, it was not unusual that he would not be home at 8.30pm. Stephen had a curfew of 10.30 pm of when he was expected to be home. I not unduly worried at the time, it was only when the door bell rang and I heard Stephen's name mentioned when the door was opened that alarm bells began to ring.

A young man we knew who lived in our area came to tell us that Stephen and his friend had been attacked at a bus stop. This young man came with his father and mentioned the name of the road, a pub in the area and the bus stop. At the time the young mans father suggested that we should contact the police to get more information as there was nothing else that he could let us know because he himself had got onto a bus and left the scene. I did call the police and I was told that they knew nothing about an attack.

My ex-husband and I immediately left the house, leaving my second son to look after my daughter who was 10 years at the time. We arrived on the road at the pub near a bus stop and saw nothing that would indicate that there was an incident. We decided to go to the hospital that was not too far away as we thought that Stephen might have made his way there if he was injured.

We arrived at the hospital and I went inside while my ex-husband went off to park the car. In the hospital I saw a young black man and a police officer but did not immediately recognise the young black man as Stephen's friend as I was looking for Stephen. A member of staff came out and went over to the young man who was standing with the police officer and asked "what did they hit him with". It was at that time that I realised who the young man was and went over to him. We were waiting a while before we were told by the hospital's doctor that Stephen had died from his injuries.

The racism that we as a family suffered initially took the form of Stephen's murder not warranting the same urgent investigation in tracking down the killers that would have happened as a matter of course should Stephen have been White. For the first two weeks the police focused their time on investigating us as a family, looking into our background as they believed that we must have been involved in criminal activities and therefore Stephen's death was related to this. Another pointless avenue that the police took was looking into whether Stephen must have been part of a gang and his death being gang related and not as an innocent bystander who was attacked solely because of the colour of his skin. In short, a racist murder.

Even though information was passed onto the police by individuals from the area where Stephen was killed, no arrest was made. It was only after a high profile meeting we had with Nelson Mandela on the 6th May 1993 nearly two weeks later that three of the men were arrested. The men were released in July 1993 and the case was dropped later that same year by the Crown Prosecution Service.

We were patronized by the Police at every level of the investigation. To say that there were a catalogue of errors made would be an understatement. We had never met the senior officer of investigating team. During the early days we had a solicitor working with us. The reason for this was that not having any contact with the police beforehand we felt the need for someone with knowledge of the law to advise us on the procedures whilst at the same time trying to cope with our grief. The police saw us having a solicitor as a hindrance rather than being supportive.

At the end of August 1993 it was decided by the police to do a review into Stephen's murder and the investigation. We reported to this new team how we felt the previous investigation had gone and asked if we could be kept informed. We

were told that this would happen but again, it never did. In September 1993 a new investigation started with a new team and this time it was decided that they would set up an covert operation of the main suspects. This operation produced visual and audio recording.

From this and with the help of our legal team we were able to start the first stage of a private prosecution hearing naming five suspects and they were arrested and first appeared at the magistrate court in the borough of Greenwich in April 1994.

In September 1995 the committal hearing took place where for the first time we were able to see the result of the covert operation showing the young men who we believed to be responsible for Stephen's murder making their racist comments about what they would do to black and Asian people. There were not only audio but visuals show stabbing movement with knives.

From the committal hearing three out of the five suspects were committed to the Old Bailey. The private prosecution started in April 1996 and last two weeks with mainly legal arguments around the friend who was with Stephen whether he was a creditable witness. In my opinion the Judge that was appointed to the case had an agenda and he did not allow the prosecution to present the case to the jury. The jury did not see the audio evidence and other evidences we had, evidence I firmly believe would have showed clearly that these men in the dock were responsible for Stephen's murder. The Judge instructed the jury to bring a not guilty verdict and the case collapsed.

In February 1997 the inquest into Stephen's murder took place and for the first time the five suspects were asked questions about Stephen's murder. The suspects refused to answer questions- not even to confirm their names. The jury at the inquest came back with the verdict that Stephen's death was "unlawful killing". It was on that occasion that the Daily Mail newspaper published on its front page the pictures of the five accused calling them murderers and challenging them to sue.

In February 1997 I with my legal team met with Jack Straw before the general election and he made the promise that he would grant a public inquiry if the Labour Government came to power. In July 1997 Jack Straw announced the inquiry and that it will be chaired by Sir William Macpherson "in order particularly to identify the lesson to be learned for investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes".

The inquiry started March 1998 and lasted 69 days with 88 witnesses and had 1200 pages of transcripts. The inquiry published in February 1999 and was seen as a watershed and was accepted by the Labour Government. The inquiry had 70 recommendations with the majority of them for the police. The police was described as "institutional racist" a label I think they deserved because all the way during the

first investigation and others that followed the police accused my family and legal team as being obstructive and said that there was a wall of silence in the community where Stephen was murdered. During the inquiry it was clear to see that the community and the family came forward and gave the police every assistance by providing names addresses of who they believed the suspects to be. The inquiry condemned police officers involved in the investigation into Stephen's murder for their "fundamental errors"

At the time the police and the justice system failed us as a family and the wider black community because of their racist behaviour and because of this did not investigate Stephen's murder in the way that they should. It was not just in the case of Stephen but many other young black men who endure racism on the streets on a daily bases at the hands of the police and the justice system.

There have been many changes in the law since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. To name but a few the Race Relation Amendment Act 2000 and the ushering out of the Double Jeopardy law- which had been in place for 800 years. Schools now have to record all racist incidents that take place in schools and police have to record all stops and searches that they carry out. Police training has changed, the way they investigate racial murders and how the courts sentence racial aggravated crime.

February of this year (2009) marked the tenth anniversary of the publication the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry with some leading ministers and senior police officers saying that institutional racism is no longer in the police forces. I and others would argue that this is not the case. The statistics are saying that black people are still seven time more likely to be stopped and searched in the UK. During the time when Stephen was killed it was six times more likely and now they are seven time more likely. I like those from the black community still see the police as institutional racist and the evidence available supports this".

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