

FROM: Portland Interfaith Clergy  
TO: Mayor Ted Wheeler

RE: Excessive use of force by Portland Police

“Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live” - Deuteronomy 16.20

We, a group of clergy representing communities of faith throughout the City of Portland, are writing to voice our dismay at what we believe to be excessive use of force by the Portland Police Department, and to speak out for the well-being of all people in this great city.

In the spirit of the ethical teachings we share, which we see as foundational to our various religious traditions, we urge you to consider that no society thrives that does not protect and serve all its inhabitants with equal care. All human beings are equal in the sight of God; all human beings deserve respect and compassion. This is our unwavering belief.

**We are alarmed** by first-hand accounts and video footage, which shows a disproportionately aggressive police response to the constitutionally protected gatherings of Portland residents.

We were especially dismayed by the police response to peaceful gatherings on October 12<sup>th</sup>, when dozens of injured people were denied medical aid by the PPB, and on January 20<sup>th</sup>, when hundreds of demonstrators were exposed to chemical agents, and bystanders were repeatedly injured (1) and again on February 20<sup>th</sup>, when police charged into crowds of demonstrators standing on the sidewalk, dragging them into the street and swinging their batons like baseball bats.

**We are appalled** to learn the nature of the weapons used against those exercising their First Amendment rights, specifically the use of Stinger Grenades, SabreRed Pepper-spray, Kinetic Impact Projectiles, and CS Gas, commonly referred to as tear gas. (2)

**We are deeply concerned** by the lack of communication from the Portland Police Bureau regarding the weapons used at demonstrations. Despite Police protocols, which require PPB to report the use of these types of weapons to EMS personnel, medical responders are regularly uninformed about the use of chemical agents and less-lethal munitions. (3)

**We find it unacceptable** that Portland Police officers are singling out and targeting street medics, who are working to treat and manage the injuries caused by Portland Police officers. Prompt and competent care of injured parties is crucial, and the disruption of medical support infrastructure at protests significantly increases the risk of serious injury or death at the hands of Bureau officers.

**We are extremely concerned** by the psychological and moral toll such police behavior is taking on those who march peaceably, and on those who witness this police behavior. We are also gravely worried by its effect on those police who are asked to perpetrate this violence.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” - Matthew 5:9

**We call upon the Mayor to**

- Immediately ban the use of Stinger Grenades, SabreRed, and Kinetic Impact Projectiles in crowd control situations.
- Immediately ban the use of launchers for CS or other gas canisters.
- Require direct personal authorization for the use of CN or CS gas in crowd control situations by either the police chief, or the police commissioner, in every instance of its use.
- Require the PPB to *immediately* report any use of chemical or less-lethal weapons to ALL local emergency rooms, clinics, AMR, Portland Fire, and any other relevant EMS agencies.
- Demand the PPB allow street medics and other responders to treat injured parties free of continued or targeted harassment by officers.
- Demand that PPB respond to unpermitted marches or rallies in the same way they respond to permitted marches, by protecting demonstrators from traffic and respecting the exercise of citizens' First Amendment rights. The Constitution of the United States protects the right to free speech and peaceful assembly, and the procurement of an arbitrary and expensive permit should not be the difference between friendly officers on bikes in pink hats and hundreds of heavily armored officers carrying weapons and lobbing grenades.
- Hand over the duties of Police Commissioner to another member of the City Council. We believe that the Mayor in charge of the Police Bureau creates an irreconcilable conflict of interest, which mitigates against reform efforts. Assigning a Police Commissioner will enhance the ability of the Mayor's Office to act as a neutral party in these matters.

All major faith traditions of the world teach non-violence as the only path to lasting peace and reconciliation within communities. Those who have taken up the cause of justice, equality, and peace throughout history and around the world, have also taught us that only through non-violence can justice at last be achieved. The escalation of violence, even in the name of upholding the law, only leads to further violence, fear, and hatred. Every individual is created in the image of God. As people of faith, we are called to love one another—neighbors, strangers, and even enemies—and have compassion for all who feel called to publicly express their convictions about justice in our communities.

We call upon the Mayor to uphold the principles of justice, public morality, and essential human dignity inherent in every human being, on behalf of all Portland residents. We invite the Mayor to sit with us and hear our concerns. Please contact Rabbi Stone of the Portland Interfaith Clergy Resistance at (503)806-5531 to set up a meeting.

*Signed,*

The committee:

Rabbi Dr. Ariel Stone, Portland Interfaith Clergy Resistance and Rabbi of Congregation Shir Tikvah

Reverend Tara Wilkins, Bridgeport United Church of Christ and ED, Community of Welcoming Congregations

Rabbi Debra Kolodny J.D., Portland UnShul and ED, Resolutions NW

Reverend Dr. Barbara Campbell, St. Mark Presbyterian Church

*Joined by*

Rabbi Brian Mayer — Religion-Outside-The-Box

Rev. Courtney McHill — Rose City Park United Methodist Church

Rev. Joshua Dunham — Moreland Presbyterian Church

Rev. Elizabeth Durant — First Congregational United Church of Christ

Priestess Blaed Spence — Reclaiming (Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles communities); recognized chapters of the Reclaiming Collective International

Rabbi Daniel Isaak - Emeritus, Congregation Neveh Shalom

Rev. Audrey Schindler ---First Presbyterian Church

Rabbi Joey Wolf - Havurah Shalom

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## ENDNOTES

1. One woman was struck in the face by an officer while leaving a restaurant and another man was shot multiple times with Kinetic Impact Projectiles after having been given express permission to pass through a police line.

2. **Stinger Grenades**, which upon exploding emit a spray of 15-30 rubber pellets, each roughly the size of a marble. These pellets are covered in chemical agents, agents which are sometimes modified to contain CS or CN gas, both of which are prohibited for use in international warfare by the international Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993, with established precedent in the Geneva Convention. The pellets are designed to traumatize the skin to the point that the chemicals covering the pellets can enter the bloodstream, causing significant pain and trauma.

**SabreRed Pepper-spray**, a Grade 3 pepper-spray which contains the highest possible concentrations of capsaicin, and is currently banned in 9 states. It is over four times more toxic than pepper-spray available for individual use (Grade 1).

**Kinetic Impact Projectiles**, commonly referred to as 'Rubber' or 'Plastic' bullets. These "less-lethal" munitions can still result in fatalities, and regularly cause significant injury. In a study conducted by British physicians, 90 instances of the use of KIPs were recorded. Those 90 incidents resulted in 1 fatality, 17 permanent disabilities, 41 injuries requiring long-term hospitalization, and a 70% rate of injuries rated as critical or severe by responding medical personnel.

**CS Gas, commonly referred to as Tear gas**, which can have devastating effects on the respiratory system, especially in people already suffering from respiratory conditions such as Asthma or COPD. As

previously stated, CS gas is prohibited for use in international warfare by the international Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993, and we are deeply concerned by its use to suppress protests. CS Gas is also uncontrollable after it has been deployed, and on January 20th wafted multiple blocks away from the deployment site near Pioneer square. People reported exposure to it as far east as Voodoo Donuts on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and North to where over a dozen people sleeping at Right To Dream Too were exposed to its effects. Its repeated use by the Portland Police Bureau in densely populated areas should be extremely concerning to all citizens.

CS Gas is also sometimes deployed via a grenade launcher, which means firing heavy metal projectiles directly into crowds of unarmed/unprotected people. One woman on January 20th was struck in the head by one of these CS Gas canisters, resulting in a severe concussion and over 3-inch laceration to her scalp.

3. As of February 27th, the Fire Department had not been provided with the chemical SDS sheets for any of these munitions, in violation of at least 2 Federal regulations including ENCR. Local area hospitals and clinics have never been briefed on or informed about instance of use or treatment protocols for these weapons, and Use of Force reports have not been filed for weapons used at demonstrations.