

Ferguson letter from black clergy becomes interracial call for justice

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(RNS) As Barbara Williams-Skinner collected signatures for a statement by leaders of African-American church groups about the Ferguson, Missouri, police shooting of Michael Brown, she found more people wanted to join in.

The general secretary of the National Council of Churches wanted to add his name; an Asian-American evangelical leader, too.

What started out as the "Joint Statement of Heads of Historic African American Church Denominations" has become an interracial cry for justice.

"It's touching hearts of people who have sons and who know that their sons would not be treated this way," said Williams-Skinner, co-chair of the National African-American Clergy Network, on August 21. "They know it's wrong. They know it's wrong before God. And they are responding on a human level."

The statement, also spearheaded by Otis Moss Jr. and T. DeWitt Smith, veteran civil rights activists, calls on African-American churches to memorialize Michael Brown, the unarmed African-American teen who was shot and killed by a white police officer on August 9. It also urges contributions to a national fund to assist his family with pending legal expenses.

"In light of the long and bloody trail of lynchings, deaths, and killings of African American youth from Emmett Till, to Trayvon Martin, to Michael Brown, and scores of others throughout our nation, we call for action, justice, and the transformation of our society," the letter reads.

The statement calls for greater voter participation and replacing elected officials with others who "represent the preservation of life in ethnic communities where a disproportionate amount of killings, unsubstantiated sentencings, and jail time, are

unwarranted means for perpetuating racism and bias against ethnic minorities.”

Other faith groups have weighed in with statements, from the North American leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the World Council of Churches.

Thousands of people signed onto a statement from Sojourners, saying they stood with Brown’s family and friends. More than 300 leaders signed a Faith in Public Life open letter to the community of Ferguson, saying they were praying for the family of Brown as well as the police officer who ended his life and the armed officers who responded to the protesters: “We love you, mourn with you, and pray for you all.”