

**Protecting a “Suspect” Community: Forum on Racial Profiling,
Federal Hate Crimes Enforcement and “Stand Your Ground’ Laws**

March 27, 2012

3-5 P.M.

2237 RHOB

Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

Opening Statement

Good Afternoon and welcome to our forum entitled “Protecting a “Suspect” Community,” a forum on racial profiling, federal hate crimes enforcement and the controversial ‘Stand Your Ground’ law. While I am formally chairing this forum, this was a joint effort, sponsored by several of my esteemed colleagues here in the US House of Representatives. Co-sponsors of this event are:

- Rep. Corrine Brown of Florida
- Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas
- Rep. Frederica Wilson of Florida
- Rep. Alcee Hastings of Florida
- Rep. Theodore E. Deutch of Florida
- Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and representative from Missouri, Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver
- Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and representative from California, Rep. Judy Chu
- Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York
- Rep. Steve Cohen of Tennessee
- Rep. Hank Johnson of Georgia
- Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois
- Rep. Al Green from Texas

The protection of all communities is one that remains of great concern to all Members of Congress, and especially those communities that have unfortunately been disproportionately victimized by racially motivated violence.

Just this past Sunday, ABC News and other sources reported that SHAY-MA ALA-WAD-EE, a mother of five, was found by her 17-year old daughter unconscious on the dining room floor of her home. She was beaten to death, and her body was accompanied with a note saying “go back to your own country.” Ms. ALA-WAD-EE, who is from Iraq, and her family had been targets of racial harassment prior to her death.

Like many who are subject to such harassment, her children reported that their mother tried to treat prior incidents as simply pranks. Unfortunately, her story is one that seems to only get attention when it is too late, and when serious bodily injury or death has occurred. It is a sad truth that racism and bigotry still exists in the 21st century.

And then of course, the world is watching the facts surrounding Trayvon Martin—the 17-year old African-American youth gunned down by 28-year old George Zimmerman, while walking home from the local 7-Eleven in Sanford, Florida. Many have heard the publicly available emergency calls, and many questions surround the circumstances leading up to the shooting, as well as the handling of the case by the Sanford Police Department.

As the nation became more informed about the case, there were many outcries for local, State, and Federal intervention. And while the focus of this forum is not to make any conclusions about Mr. Martin's case, I commend the US Attorney General Eric Holder and the Department of Justice's decision to conduct an independent, thorough investigation of Mr. Martin's case, and the decision to send DOJ's Community Relations Services on the ground to deal with tensions which have surfaced in Sanford, Florida and surrounding areas.

The focus of this forum is to educate the public about racially motivated crimes and the role of the federal government in the investigation and prosecution of such crimes.

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge the parents of Trayvon Martin—Ms. Sybrina Fulton and Mr. Tracy Martin, who are accompanying us today. No parent imagines losing their child, especially to violence, and many of us cannot even envision what the last month has been like for you since receiving the news about your son, Trayvon.

I applaud your composure and appreciate you attending this forum. No matter the outcome of the matter, please know that your son's death was not in vain and through tragedy, our nation is doing a lot of soul-searching about who we are as a country, and what we want to become in the future. Thank you and our thoughts remain with you.

At this time, I'd like to introduce all of our experts. For our first panel we have:

- Becky Monroe, Acting Director of the Department of Justice's Community Relations Services

For our second panel we have:

- Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Prof. Deborah A. Ramirez, Professor at Northeastern University School of Law and Executive Director of Partnering for Prevention and Community Safety
- Albert E. Dotson, Jr, Chairmen of 100 Black Men of America, Inc.
- Dennis Parker, Director of ACLU's Racial Justice Project
- Director Robert "Bobby" Parker, Former Director of the Miami-Dade Police Department
- David Stacy, Deputy Legislative Director of Human Rights Campaign
- Daniel Gross, President of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence
- Darryl Parks, President of the National Bar Association

In the interest of time, Members are able to give brief remarks, no more than 2 minutes, so that we can hear from all of our experts.