

# Police kill 30-year-old mentally ill man in El Cajon, California

By Norisa Diaz  
29 September 2016

On Tuesday police in El Cajon, California, a suburb northeast of San Diego, shot and killed Alfred Olango, a 30 year-old mentally ill Ugandan immigrant who worked as a cook. Witnesses say that Olango was both Tased and shot at least five times by police in the parking lot of a small strip mall.

The mentally ill are the most vulnerable in society, and many have met a tragic fate at the hands of police. Mental illness is a factor in roughly a quarter of all police killings. According to the Washington Post's database of police killings, Olango was at least the 716th person killed by police this year and the 173rd mentally ill victim.

Olango's sister originally called the police to help rescue her brother who was walking through traffic and acting erratically. Friends and relatives described Olango as suffering from mental health issues and stated that he had recently suffered a mental breakdown.

The victim's family had reportedly called the police in the past and there is no doubt that responding officers were aware of his condition.

"I called you to help me, but you killed my brother," Olango's sister cried in video footage caught by bystanders in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. "You guys killed my brother in front of me....Why couldn't you guys Tase him? Why? Why? Why? Why?"

Video of the shooting was caught on a cell phone by a Los Panchos restaurant employee taken from a drive thru but was promptly confiscated by police. Maria, a Los Panchos employee told NBC San Diego that police entered the restaurant and took cell phones from employees, ordering them not to speak to anyone.

In an effort to quell protests and demonstrations which are ongoing, authorities released a single frame

of the video showing an image of Olango with his arms forward and hands clasped, mimicking the stance of officers who have their guns drawn on him. Police insist that Olango did not comply when ordered and that his stance justified the deadly shots fired by the officers.

El Cajon Police Chief Jeff Davis told reporters, "At one point, the male rapidly drew an object from his front pants pocket, placed both hands together on it and extended it rapidly towards the officer, taking what appeared to be a shooting stance, putting the object in the officer's face."

Davis claimed that while another officer attempted to Tase Olango, "simultaneously, the officer who had the object pointed at him," shot Olango. The police quickly admitted that the object Olango held in his hand was an electronic cigarette.

Local resident Michael Rodriguez witnessed the shooting and described Olango as "scared to death."

"When I saw the suspect, he had his hands up," Rodriguez said. "I saw two officers with their firearm on him....The man's hands are up. No shirt. He didn't have no shirt."

"He's jerking, he's confused, he runs this way, and as soon as he runs this way, they discharge," Rodriguez added.

Demonstrators and Olango's family are demanding answers as to why the police officers had not used non-lethal force and are calling for the entire video to be released.

Immediately following the shooting, nearly 200 locals and witnesses rallied Tuesday evening around the blood soaked pavement in the shopping center where Olango was killed and demonstrations continued Wednesday morning and into the night.

Police authorities and the political establishment are

fearful that demonstrations in El Cajon will grow even as protests in Charlotte, North Carolina continue in response to the September 20 police killing of 43-year-old Keith Lamont Scott.

The WSWS spoke to some of those who turned out for the protests Wednesday evening.

“There’s no reason for him to be shot and killed,” John told WSWS reporters. “They have plenty of non lethal weapons, why didn’t they use bean bags on him? He was 30 years young. I was in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and I’ve seen more killings here. This is not war, this is a community.”

Michael another demonstrator emphasized the lack of mental health facilities and the effects of poverty. “Ronald Reagan closed so many mental hospitals in the 80s. Not everybody who is mentally handicapped is a violent thug. We have a shortage of mental health professionals; the people on the lower end of the economic food chain have more psychological problems because they have no hope. They have no way to pay for their crumbling teeth when they need to be fixed. They have no way to spend \$3 a gallon on gasoline, it’s getting expensive out there.”

“The corporations in this country are taking all the profits and giving them to the stockholders, trillions of dollars. Why are they targeting the people in the poor neighborhoods? Because they’re not a productive part of society, because they have psychiatric and mental health problems and there is no one there to help them,” Michael remarked.

Jane told the WSWS that she has had epilepsy since the age of fourteen. “My son asked me, when you have a seizure ‘should I call the cops?’ and I didn’t know what to tell him. Just because cops have pressures to work with doesn’t mean they are not liable for their actions.”

The political establishment overseen by Democratic Governor Jerry Brown are complicit in the harsh realities faced by California’s most vulnerable residents. The Brown administration has overseen millions of dollars in cuts to welfare programs and social services, which have resulted in the closing of mental health institutions. The mentally ill comprise about one third of the homeless population in the country and many in California find themselves funneled into the state’s vast and brutal prison system.

Governor Brown and the California legislature’s

2017-2018 fiscal budget includes the allocation of \$270 million to upgrade and expand prisons and well as the elimination of the Maximum Family Grant for welfare assistance established in 1994. This provision will issue a mere \$136 per month and eliminate benefit increases for existing welfare recipients who have children, saving the state tens of millions per year.

El Cajon has the highest rate of poverty in San Diego County at 25.8% according to the National University System Institute for Policy Research (NUSIPR).

The report focused on areas of high concentrated poverty and found that the number of residents living in poor neighborhoods has jumped by 10 percent since 2000. It also found that concentrated pockets of poverty in San Diego County rose from 42.1 percent in 2000 to 45.6 percent in 2014.

Despite the fact that society is more racially integrated than ever before, upper middle class purveyors of a racist narrative insist that society is seething with insurmountable racial tensions. Society is seething but it is the result of growing social inequality and efforts by the ruling class to suppress any social opposition from the working class.

The degree to which racism plays a role in any particular police killing does not distort the fact that across the board the overwhelming majority of victims of police violence are poor or working class.

Armed ever more with military training, weaponry and equipment, direct from the imperialist wars abroad, the police function as the armed thugs of the ruling elite with their crosshairs set on poor and working class communities.

The widening protests against police killings by workers and youth around the country represent an initial expression of the deserved disdain of the current social and political system and unprecedented social inequality.

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