

## Civil Rights, Community Groups Respond to Fourth NYPD Spying Report

[NEW YORK, NY, 01/26/2022] -- Today, a group of community and civil rights organizations responded to the fourth annual public report on the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) intelligence operations from Stephen Robinson, the Civilian Representative on the NYPD's "Handschu Committee." Former Mayor de Blasio appointed Robinson as the Civilian Representative in 2017. The position came as part of a series of reforms resulting from community mobilization in reaction to widespread NYPD spying on Muslim communities. The Handschu Guidelines were revised to limit surveillance of religious and political activity. The fourth report covers the period from March 2020 to March 2021.

"As we have noted since the beginning of his term, the NYPD Inspector General found in August 2016 that 95 percent of the NYPD's surveillance activities were focused on Muslims," said **Debbie Almontaser of Muslim Community Network**. "Nothing in the fourth, penultimate report from the Civilian Representative years into his tenure disabuses us of that notion. We have repeatedly stressed in community meetings with the Civilian Representative that this is an unacceptably high number as it is a clear sign of biased policing, and have asked him and NYPD officials to look into this."

"We welcome Judge Robinson's commitment, as his fourth report lays out other internal practices concerning the reliability of information which have formally changed in the past two years, confirming the continued necessity of the position" said **Naz Ahmad of the CLEAR project**. "In addition, the reported statistics indicate that investigations lasted for less time on average than the period covered by the third report, meaning that individuals and or/organizations were not subjected to needlessly long investigation, but it was troubling to see that the number of approved requests to close investigations decreased by 10%, meaning more investigations stayed open. However, notably, his report does not address whether the COVID-19 pandemic affected any of these statistics, as the report covers the first year of the pandemic."

"The report fails to provide any specific information concerning the Intelligence Bureau's activities surrounding the 2020 protests in defense of Black lives," said **Rama Issa-Ibrahim (she/her), spokesperson for Communities United for Police Reform**. "Although the report notes that the civilian representative met with NYPD leadership to discuss the debriefing of protestors, the report is silent as to what he learned from those conversations and how the NYPD's practices affect residents who mobilized for racial justice. Communities have been demanding accountability for the NYPD's suppression of First Amendment rights and transparency around related misconduct at the protests, and this report does not tell the full story."

In 2021, community groups [voiced similar concerns](#), including the issue of the demographics of the targets of these investigations, which remains unaddressed. This pattern of focus on one faith-based group further underlines the dire need for a tireless Civilian Representative.

Originally ordered by consent decree in 1985, the Handschu Guidelines are the result of a class action lawsuit, *Handschu v. Special Services Division*, which established important limits on NYPD intelligence operations. The new safeguards— including the placement of a Civilian Representative within the Handschu Committee overseeing Intelligence Bureau surveillance of constitutionally protected religious and political organizing— were introduced into the Guidelines

as part of the joint settlement process of an enforcement motion in the Handschu class action and the *Raza v. City of New York* case.

As part of his duties, the Civilian Representative is required to file an annual report on the NYPD's compliance with the Handschu Guidelines. Mayor Eric Adams has yet to announce whether he will seek to discontinue the position, which is he able to do after the first five years of the creation of the position. The content of Judge Robinson's reports affirm the continued necessity of the position, as he has noted considerable changes for the better in the Handschu Committee's activities since his appointment.

In anticipation of Judge Robinson's last report, to cover the period March 2021 – March 2022, the groups listed below urge Judge Robinson:

1. To press the NYPD-IB on its focus on Muslims, as noted in the 2016 Inspector General report that 95% of targets of Handschu investigations were Muslim, and to provide information about the demographics of the targets of Handschu investigations in his upcoming meetings with community and civil society stakeholders and in his next report.
2. Investigate the NYPD-IB's activities in response to Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, including its questioning of people in connection with protest-related conduct, and to provide information about those activities in his upcoming meetings with community and civil society stakeholders in his final report.
3. To address the ongoing importance of the Civilian Representative role in his final report.

Separately, the group calls on Mayor Adams to maintain the position of the Civilian Representative. In the event Mayor Adams appoints a new Civilian Representative, we call on Mayor Adams to do so only after robust consultation with a representative cross-section of community and civil society stakeholders, including but not limited to the undersigned groups. Mayor Bill de Blasio disappointingly failed to engage in any such consultation prior to Judge Robinson's appointment.

The signatories include:

Arab American Association of New York (AAA-NY)  
Communities United for Police Reform  
Council on American Islamic Relations, New York (CAIR-NY)  
Creating Law Enforcement Responsibility and Responsibility project (CLEAR)  
Muslim Community Network (MCN)  
Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (STOP)

Contact:

Debbie Almontaser, Emgage NY, [dalmontaser@emgageaction.org](mailto:dalmontaser@emgageaction.org)  
Rama Issa-Ibrahim, [rama@changethenypd.org](mailto:rama@changethenypd.org)  
Naz Ahmad, Senior Staff Attorney, CLEAR, [naz.ahmad@law.cuny.edu](mailto:naz.ahmad@law.cuny.edu)