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**Remarks by  
Joseph McMillan, NOBLE National President  
Region VI Conference**

**October 24, 2009**

**First giving all honor to God, the one who saw fit to allow me to rise this morning, travel across country and to be with you. Second, let me express my sincere thanks to your Regional Vice President, Mr. Andre Anderson for the outstanding work he is doing in representing this Region on NOBLE's Executive Board. To NOBLE's First Vice President, Deputy Chief Ernest Green, who in a few short months will be taking up the charge of leading our great organization; to the Bay Area Chapter President and its members for all that you have done to make this training endeavor and awards dinner such a success and to the various awards recipients that are being recognized tonight, it is my pleasure being here, representing the close to 3,000 members of our great organization.**

What a great topic for us to focus on for a few minutes. **"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."** In preparing for my remarks I was drawn to these words by the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who wrote them in his infamous "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail." In writing this famed letter, Dr. King took an introspective look at the role the clergy was playing in failing to be

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vocal on issues in their communities and challenged them to virtually “step up to the plate” and speak out against those that were engaging in racial bias against black Americans. Similarly, I suggest that as law enforcement professionals, we too have a sworn duty to protect against injustice and challenge those amongst us that are tarnishing this shield that we wear to cease and desist. As an organization, NOBLE has a unique voice in addressing issues that impact the community and it is from this perspective that I will be speaking today.

That said, there are several recent incidents where some of our colleagues have acted in ways that is a direct contradiction of that sworn duty.

Over the past few years, incidents of excessive force have become increasingly prevalent. Advancements in modern technology, the Internet and the 24-hour news cycle have changed the way the public receives information. What previously may have remained in Internal Affairs is now immediately part of the public record. In just the past 6 months, there have been several troubling incidents in the news:

- In Florida, a 22-year old man was punched in the face by officers during an incident at a bank this past December.

- In February of this year, video surfaced of a homeless man in Fresno being punched in the face while being taken into custody.
- In Michigan last month, a Grand Valley State University student was shot as his off-campus apartment was searched for marijuana. He was unarmed.
- Also last month, video of a man being arrested in Kansas in his own driveway was circulated. The video showed officers holding down and kicking the man.
- And two of the highest profile incidents happened here in California:
  - On New Year's Day, video was widely circulated of a BART police officer shooting Oscar Grant on a station platform. Grant was unarmed and already subdued by officers. Videos of this incident have had more than a million views on YouTube.
  - And in October of 2008, Julian Alexander was shot at his home in Anaheim after he went outside to investigate a strange noise.

These incidents underscore a disturbing trend. Unfortunately, the actions of a few have a drastic impact on all of law enforcement.

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**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”**

As an organization, NOBLE roundly condemns the use of excessive force and considers such actions a violation of civil rights. Deadly force should only be used in defense of a human life, and the situations discussed thus far in my opinion do not fit that criteria.

Officers must be properly trained – and required to take refresher training courses – that will better enable them to react appropriately in life threatening situations. As law enforcement officials, we are regularly faced with situations and decisions where our lives, and the lives of others, are quite literally in our hands. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are equipped with the essential knowledge to make split-second decisions, while at the same time not exceed our authority.

On the other side of the excessive force issue are the recent incidents where officers in the line of duty have been killed by suspects.

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- In Philadelphia, Officer John Pawlowski was killed by 33-year-old Rasheed Scrugs when responding to a taxi robbery. Pawlowski confronted Scrugs who opened fire using a gun hidden beneath his jacket. Scrugs was wounded in the incident when other officers on the scene returned fire.
  - In Pittsburgh, three officers were recently killed when responding to what was described as a “domestic dispute between a mother and son with no weapons.” The subject of the call, 22-year-old Richard “Pop” Poplawski, knew police had been called and waited for the officer to arrive, armed with an AK-47 assault-style rifle, a .22-caliber rifle and a revolver and wearing a bulletproof vest. He shot and killed Officers Eric Kelly, Stephen Mayhle and Paul J. Sciallo within minutes of their arrival. After a 4-hour siege during which he exchanged several rounds with SWAT, Poplawski surrendered. He was wounded in the leg.
  - And in here in Oakland, Officer John Hege and Sergeant Mark Dunakin were killed in the line of duty when attempting to stop a suspect, Lovelle Mixon, on what appeared to be a routine traffic stop. After shooting the officers, Mixon fled on foot. Sergeant Ervin Romans and Sergeant Daniel Sakai were shot in SWAT attempts to apprehend the suspect. Mixon, who was on

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parole and had a warrant for his arrest for violating parole, was killed when officers returned fire.

Officers on the streets are there to protect – and senseless attacks upon these officers is simply not acceptable. The increased perception that law enforcement is against the community – a perception that is exacerbated where there have been incidents of unarmed citizens being killed by police – has created an air that it is acceptable to shoot at police officers. These heinous acts simply must stop. There has been too many incidents across the country where officers have paid the ultimately price protecting citizens from people that have no compunction in attacking police officers. Anyone arrested for firing at a police officer should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”**

As law enforcement executives – we must embody this ideal. We must remain committed to equipping officers with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to make the best decisions possible in the most difficult of situations. We must impress upon citizens that we as law enforcement officers are there for their protection, and that any sort of violence against law enforcement is not acceptable.

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In closing, I submit that **injustice by law enforcement official's breeds injustice.**

Just as Dr. King could not sit idly as injustices were occurring in Birmingham, we cannot sit idly as tensions rise between law enforcement and communities nationwide. We are all indeed brethren in law enforcement, and what happens here in Oakland impacts me in Washington; what happens in Philadelphia impacts law enforcement in Chicago; what happens in Florida impacts those in Texas. We must root out injustice in all segments of our profession. By following the adage that its always ripe to do right, we can improve situations nationwide by remaining committed to Justice by Action.