

Statement from Liam and Dijon Joseph

29 October 2020

Early in the evening of 27 February 2018, we were stopped and searched in South London by six police officers from the TSG. They surrounded us, physically detained us including by using handcuffs, and searched us in public over a period of about 20 minutes. It was humiliating; we were distressed and confused, although for that understandable reaction Dijon was described by police as “incredibly evasive and aggressive”. They say they thought we were dealing drugs. Of course we were not – but why did they assume that? The only explanation we have seen is that it was because we fist bumped each other, and because we were in Deptford High Street at the time. The reality of course of this is that this happened because we are young black men. Our very skin colour is ‘suspicious’, which is why we are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched.

We welcomed and supported the IOPC investigation, as an opportunity for the police to learn from what happened to us; even to examine their own motives. But these officers opted to give “no comment” interviews, and the IOPC said that there was not enough evidence to say it was discrimination. If the complaints system can’t join the dots in an experience like ours then that system also needs to change, and this week’s recommendations from the IOPC are only as valuable as the system which enforces them.

After the IOPC complaint failed we approached the Equality & Human Rights Commission for help in bringing a case. They refused. We asked the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to admit discrimination under the Equality Act and they too refused. Having exhausted all other options we have today started civil proceedings at court against the Metropolitan Police for discrimination, assault and false imprisonment. It remains our hope in doing so that the police and all the systems surrounding them will learn from our experience; change is past due.

Carolynn Gallwey, a partner at Bhatt Murphy who acts for the brothers says: *“Liam and Dijon’s case captures all that is wrong with the use of stop and search, including in how the statutory checks and balances fail to capture the underlying discrimination. While this week’s IOPC recommendations are welcome what is lacking is an honest and open acknowledgement that basic discrimination underpins the ever-worsening statistics on stop and search. My firm is receiving a record number of enquiries about the discriminatory use of stop and search at the moment – proper reform has never been needed more”.*