

African Canadian Cop Calls For Expansion Of Black Organized Crime Unit

Community Expresses Strong Disagreement, Will Seek Disbandment

By Olembe Wickham
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Three prominent African Canadians have expressed disagreement with a statement by an African Canadian Metro police officer that a special "Black crime" unit should be expanded.

Last Friday, Detective David McLeod of the Black Organized Crime Squad told the inquest into the police shooting of Ian Coley that operations of the unit should not only be maintained, but actually increased.

Davies Bagambiire, executive director of the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC), disagreed with the remarks saying that the unit unfairly targets the African Canadian community. "We do not think that this idea (of a Black crime unit) is consistent with the concept of equality," he told *Pride*.

Detective McLeod, an African Canadian, said during his testimony to the Coley inquest that he felt that there is a need for the unit because it provides the necessary insight into the community thus aiding police in fighting criminals that prey on the African Canadian community.

Black Action Defense Committee chair Dudley Laws disagreed with this assessment. "There is no need for a specific unit to police the Black community," Laws insisted. "The police should be focusing on crime in general."

Toronto lawyer Charles Roach agreed

with this, saying, that the community should have an input into the kind of policing there is. "One of the things I would like to recommend is that there be no ethnic-focused squads, unless the community wants it," he suggested.

Bagambiire stated that he has no objections to the police having specialized units such as the drug or homicide squads because of their broad perspective. "Those kinds of squads focus on the entire community," he explained. "They don't make any distinctions, whether you are Black, Chinese or White."

He suggested that, in fact, a special investigative squad for African Canadians is redundant. "There is no necessity for a specialized squad that investigates only Black people when you have the Intelligent Services Unit in the Metro Police Force that investigates everyone that has committed any kind of an offense or crime," he said.

Bagambiire added that the crime squad has negative implications because of the potential for intelligence to be collected on innocent African Canadians, which he says has happened in the past. "Intelligence information once collected, however benign the objective may be, usually ends up applied for wrong purposes," he elaborated.

Roach referred to a 1991 list of African Canadians, compiled by the police, who were targeted for surveillance. The lawyer

said that the list included community activists such as *Pride* columnist Milton Blake and Nomvuyo Hyman. "We know that this Black Organized Crime Squad has been targeting people who are not involved in crime at all," he stated. Roach's name was also on this list.

He added that having African Canadian undercover police officers within the community would have a divisive effect on the community because there would be suspicion over who might be a spy.

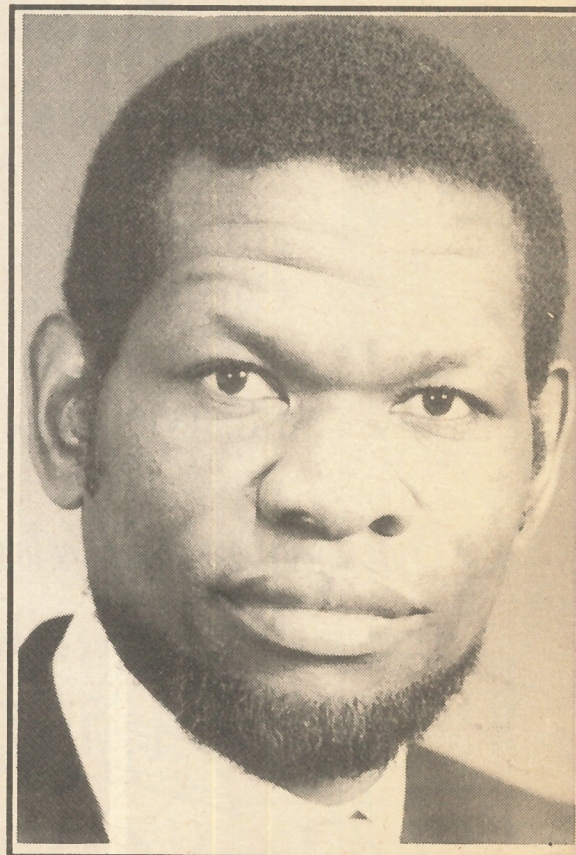
Bagambiire acknowledged that there are criminal elements in the African Canadian community, but added that having a crime unit based on race may be a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: "(A race-based police unit) is totally unacceptable in a free and democratic society that supposedly acts on the basis of principles of equality."

Roach said that his office has previously looked into challenging the Black Organized Crime Squad's existence, citing Charter provisions such as security of person and privacy as rights being violated.

Bagambiire revealed that the ACLC will be pursuing legal channels to facilitate the disbandment

of the squad.

McLeod was unable to comment when contacted by *Pride* due to his status as a witness at the uncompleted Coley investigation. ☑



Davies Bagambiire, executive director of the African Canadian Legal Clinic.