



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS ISSUES STATEMENT ON THE JENA 6 CASE

Washington, D.C. – Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer made the following comments concerning the Jena 6 case, “The Jena 6 refers to six young people from Jena, Louisiana who were charged with various crimes stemming from a racially-charged episode at the local high school. Though the incident involves both black and white students, the consequences of each group have been gravely different.

“What this case tells us is that unequal justice is clearly alive and thriving in the United States. The small town of Jena has been thrust into the national spotlight reminding the entire world of the deplorable days when African Americans had limited civil rights and were subjected to random acts of violence without provocation.

“The point that some seem to miss is that the students were given jail time for being involved in a simple high school fist-fight. I am not advocating violence, but we should not miss this opportunity to teach children how to properly resolve conflicts and the importance of understanding cultural differences. The long-term implications of allowing the justice system to punish youthful indiscretions hurt us all and deny these young men an opportunity to positively contribute to society.

“Unbelievably, in 2007, it is not at all unusual to hear or see news stories that feature blatant racial bias and injustice. From Don Imus’ comments to the current media sensationalization of O.J. Simpson’s recent arrest, racial tension in America still persists and exists just below the surface of the American consciousness.

“Fortunately, the media attention on this case has motivated people across this country to engage and influence justice through positive protest. It has also sparked candid conversations about inequalities in our judicial system. Most importantly, it serves as a constant reminder that an attack on civil rights is also an attack on human rights and threatens our American way of life.

“When I was a teen, I was involved in conflicts that sometimes were resolved with violence. I am not proud of this fact. However, I was given an opportunity to learn and grow from my mistakes, which enabled me to become the person I am today.

“Though a state appeals court last Friday reversed the adult conviction of Mychal Bell, he remains incarcerated and deserves a fair trial in a juvenile court. We cannot tolerate unfair and arbitrary application of the law.

“As the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I am wearing black today in support of all those who are marching for the Jena 6 and for equal justice for everyone.”

Tom Cochran, Executive Director of the Conference, added, “The United States Conference of Mayors, an organization representing the nation’s mayors, has a history and tradition of involvement in civil rights. Since 1963 when President Kennedy put race relations on the Conference’s agenda, the organization has actively and collectively championed issues of civil rights all over the country. That tradition continues today as we stand in support of the Jena 6.”

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today, each represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the Mayor.