

As Ferguson Probe Continues, Feds Rethinking Racial Profiling

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said on Monday he would soon release new guidelines to limit racial profiling by federal law enforcement, a move long awaited by civil rights advocates.

Holder announced his plan at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where 1960s civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached.

Holder's comments came in the wake of unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, after a grand jury's decision last week not to indict a white police officer in the killing of unarmed black teen Michael Brown.

Holder said he would announce the guidelines "in the coming days" as part of President Barack Obama's response to the tension between law enforcement and minority communities that the events in Ferguson exposed.

The Bush administration outlawed racial profiling by federal law enforcement in 2003 but it applied only to national security cases and did not limit officers from discriminating based on factors apart from race, such as national origin, religion or sexual orientation.

Civil rights advocates have long called on the federal government to expand the guidelines. It is not known what groups Holder will include.

The new guidelines would not pertain to local or state law enforcement, such as the Ferguson Police Department where officer Darren Wilson worked when he shot Brown. But Holder and civil-rights advocates have said the federal guidelines will set the example for local agencies.

"The new guidance will codify our commitment to the very highest standards of fair and effective policing," Holder said in prepared remarks.

Holder drew applause from the packed interfaith service when he said the Justice Department's civil investigation into the Ferguson police department and a simultaneous probe into officer Wilson "remain ongoing and remain active."

He also criticized violent protesters and looters after the grand jury's decision. His speech was then briefly interrupted by hecklers holding signs that said "No Justice. No Peace" and "Eric Holder Do Your Job."

"The point we're trying to get across is that Ferguson is everywhere," said demonstrator Taliba Obuya, 31, from Atlanta.

Holder held an evening meeting with a small group of law enforcement officials and community leaders, among them Dr. King's daughter, Bernice.

"This whole emphasis on this issue was born of a tragedy but it presents this nation with an opportunity. It's incumbent on all of us to seize that opportunity," he said during that meeting.

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