



**August 18, 2017**

### **U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Statement on Charlottesville, Virginia**

Washington D.C. -- The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, by unanimous vote, expresses its profound dismay over the violent and deadly events in Charlottesville, Virginia between August 11 and 13, 2017, motivated by racial and religious intolerance. We join the nation in mourning the death of 32-year-old Heather Heyer,<sup>1</sup> who with many other injured people, was the victim of apparent domestic terrorism<sup>2</sup> motivated by a white supremacist ideology. Ms. Heyer lives now in our national memory as a martyr for racial and religious justice. We also mourn the deaths of State Troopers H. J. Cullen, 48, and Berke Bates, a day short of 41, who died in a tragic helicopter crash after they were dispatched to monitor the violence in Charlottesville.<sup>3</sup>

As Americans, we are committed to the right to assemble peaceably, but we condemn racial, ethnic and religious hatred, incitement and violence. The events in Charlottesville stand as another tragic and painful reminder that an ideology of racial and religious intolerance can lead in an instant to irretrievable acts of violence, death and suffering.

As a nation, we have marched through legally sanctioned slavery, secession, Civil War, Reconstruction, KKK terror, internment of Japanese-American citizens, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era, in pursuit of equality. Progress has come only through the courage of individuals, not all of whom are remembered as they should be, and with the resolve of our leaders and the people alike to stand for the rule of law, equal protection, and human dignity.

We urge the United States Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and appropriate Virginia law enforcement officials, to bring any and all people responsible for Ms. Heyer's killing to justice, and we urge authorities to use all available resources to investigate the other apparent crimes, including any federal or state hate crimes, that were committed in Charlottesville last weekend.<sup>4</sup>

In this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, we all must grapple with the violence in Charlottesville as a bracing reminder that the nation's work to ensure equality is both urgent and ongoing. White supremacy and religious intolerance dishonor national commitments we have forged over time – that is they demean America and Americans, and violence in the name of these ideologies must be met swiftly and forcefully with condemnation and an unwavering and unified response.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon said: "Every American deserves to live confident in the expectation that

his and her equal dignity will be respected and receive protection from government agencies. Last week's violence, driven by racial animus, degrades our nation and merits swift, aggressive, and comprehensive federal response."

In America, we live by the rule of law and the law must prevail in Charlottesville, Virginia, as in any city or town faced with similar violence. Sadly, we know that no law will bring back the fallen. We live too by symbols, and Ms. Heather Heyer stands as a painful but ennobling symbol that our nation must not depart from the fight for equality and human dignity. In the words of Ms. Heyer's neighbor, "She lived her life like a path – and it was one of justice."<sup>5</sup> On behalf of the Commission, we urge the nation to rededicate itself to walk that path.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about the Commission, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Wynne Davis, *Charlottesville Victim Heather Heyer 'Stood Up' Against What She Felt Was Wrong*, National Public Radio (Aug. 13, 2017), <https://n.pr/2uzGtia>.

<sup>2</sup> Eileen Sullivan, *'Evil Attack' in Virginia Is Domestic Terrorism, Sessions Says*, N.Y. Times (Aug 14, 2017), <https://nyti.ms/2vx5Sbf>.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Weiner, *Virginia State Troopers Killed in Helicopter Crash Monitoring Charlottesville Clash*, Washington Post (Aug. 13, 2017), [http://wapo.st/2fCWqxd?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.3b62c59e4bed](http://wapo.st/2fCWqxd?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.3b62c59e4bed).

<sup>4</sup> Maggie Astor, *A Guide to the Violence in Charlottesville*, N.Y. Times (Aug. 13, 2017), <https://nyti.ms/2vvL7MW>.

<sup>5</sup> Dominique Mosbergen & Andy Campbell, *Heather Heyer 'Murdered While Protesting Against Hate' In Charlottesville, Friends Say*, Huffington Post (Aug. 13, 2017), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/heather-heyer-charlottesville-victim\\_us\\_59902e7ee4b09071f69a41c0](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/heather-heyer-charlottesville-victim_us_59902e7ee4b09071f69a41c0).