

President Obama's remarks about Baltimore, Tuesday, April 28, at a press conference with the Japanese prime minister.

With respect to Baltimore, let me make a couple of points. First, obviously our thoughts continue to be with the family of Freddie Gray. Understandably, they want answers. And DOJ has opened an investigation. It is working with local law enforcement to find out exactly what happened, and I think there should be full transparency and accountability.

Second, my thoughts are with the police officers who were injured in last night's disturbances. It underscores that that's a tough job and we have to keep that in mind, and my hope is that they can heal and get back to work as soon as possible.

Point number three, there's no excuse for the kind of violence that we saw yesterday. It is counterproductive. When individuals get crowbars and start prying open doors to loot, they're not protesting, they're not making a statement -- they're stealing. When they burn down a building, they're committing arson. And they're destroying and undermining businesses and opportunities in their own communities that rob jobs and opportunity from people in that area.

So it is entirely appropriate that the mayor of Baltimore, who I spoke to yesterday, and the governor, who I spoke to yesterday, work to stop that kind of senseless violence and destruction. That is not a protest. That is not a statement. It's people -- a handful of people taking advantage of a situation for their own purposes, and they need to be treated as criminals.

Point number four, the violence that happened yesterday distracted from the fact that you had seen multiple days of peaceful protests that were focused on entirely legitimate concerns of these communities in Baltimore, led by clergy and community leaders. And they were constructive and they were thoughtful, and frankly, didn't get that much attention. And one burning building will be looped on television over and over and over again, and the thousands of demonstrators who did it the right way I think have been lost in the discussion.

The overwhelming majority of the community in Baltimore I think have handled this appropriately, expressing real concern and outrage over the possibility that our laws were not applied evenly in the case of Mr. Gray, and that accountability needs to exist. And I think we have to give them credit. My understanding is, is you've got some of the same organizers now going back into these communities to try to

clean up in the aftermath of a handful of criminals and thugs who tore up the place. What they were doing, what those community leaders and clergy and others were doing, that is a statement. That's the kind of organizing that needs to take place if we're going to tackle this problem. And they deserve credit for it, and we should be lifting them up.

Point number five -- and I've got six, because this is important. Since Ferguson, and the task force that we put together, we have seen too many instances of what appears to be police officers interacting with individuals -- primarily African American, often poor -- in ways that have raised troubling questions. And it comes up, it seems like, once a week now, or once every couple of weeks. And so I think it's pretty understandable why the leaders of civil rights organizations but, more importantly, moms and dads across the country, might start saying this is a crisis. What I'd say is this has been a slow-rolling crisis. This has been going on for a long time. This is not new, and we shouldn't pretend that it's new.

The good news is, is that perhaps there's some newfound awareness because of social media and video cameras and so forth that there are problems and challenges when it comes to how policing and our laws are applied in certain communities, and we have to pay attention to it and respond.

What's also good news is the task force that was made up of law enforcement and community activists that we brought together here in the White House have come up with very constructive concrete proposals that, if adopted by local communities and by states and by counties, by law enforcement generally, would make a difference. It wouldn't solve every problem, but would make a concrete difference in rebuilding trust and making sure that the overwhelming majority of effective, honest and fair law enforcement officers, that they're able to do their job better because it will weed out or retrain or put a stop to those handful who may be not doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Now, the challenge for us as the federal government is, is that we don't run these police forces. I can't federalize every police force in the country and force them to retrain. But what I can do is to start working with them collaboratively so that they can begin this process of change themselves.

And coming out of the task force that we put together, we're now working with local communities. The Department of Justice has just announced a grant program for those jurisdictions that want to purchase body cameras. We are going to be issuing grants for those jurisdictions that are prepared to start trying to implement

some of the new training and data collection and other things that can make a difference. And we're going to keep on working with those local jurisdictions so that they can begin to make the changes that are necessary.

I think it's going to be important for organizations like the Fraternal Order of Police and other police unions and organization to acknowledge that this is not good for police. We have to own up to the fact that occasionally there are going to be problems here, just as there are in every other occupation. There are some bad politicians who are corrupt. There are folks in the business community or on Wall Street who don't do the right thing. Well, there's some police who aren't doing the right thing. And rather than close ranks, what we've seen is a number of thoughtful police chiefs and commissioners and others recognize they got to get their arms around this thing and work together with the community to solve the problem. And we're committed to facilitating that process.

So the heads of our COPS agency that helps with community policing, they're already out in Baltimore. Our Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division is already out in Baltimore. But we're going to be working systematically with every city and jurisdiction around the country to try to help them implement some solutions that we know work.

And I'll make my final point -- I'm sorry, Mr. Prime Minister, but this is a pretty important issue for us.

We can't just leave this to the police. I think there are police departments that have to do some soul searching. I think there are some communities that have to do some soul searching. But I think we, as a country, have to do some soul searching. This is not new. It's been going on for decades.

And without making any excuses for criminal activities that take place in these communities, what we also know is that if you have impoverished communities that have been stripped away of opportunity, where children are born into abject poverty; they've got parents -- often because of substance-abuse problems or incarceration or lack of education themselves -- can't do right by their kids; if it's more likely that those kids end up in jail or dead, than they go to college. In communities where there are no fathers who can provide guidance to young men; communities where there's no investment, and manufacturing has been stripped away; and drugs have flooded the community, and the drug industry ends up being the primary employer for a whole lot of folks -- in those environments, if we think

that we're just going to send the police to do the dirty work of containing the problems that arise there without as a nation and as a society saying what can we do to change those communities, to help lift up those communities and give those kids opportunity, then we're not going to solve this problem. And we'll go through the same cycles of periodic conflicts between the police and communities and the occasional riots in the streets, and everybody will feign concern until it goes away, and then we go about our business as usual.

If we are serious about solving this problem, then we're going to not only have to help the police, we're going to have to think about what can we do -- the rest of us -- to make sure that we're providing early education to these kids; to make sure that we're reforming our criminal justice system so it's not just a pipeline from schools to prisons; so that we're not rendering men in these communities unemployable because of a felony record for a nonviolent drug offense; that we're making investments so that they can get the training they need to find jobs. That's hard. That requires more than just the occasional news report or task force. And there's a bunch of my agenda that would make a difference right now in that.

Now, I'm under no illusion that out of this Congress we're going to get massive investments in urban communities, and so we'll try to find areas where we can make a difference around school reform and around job training, and around some investments in infrastructure in these communities trying to attract new businesses in.

But if we really want to solve the problem, if our society really wanted to solve the problem, we could. It's just it would require everybody saying this is important, this is significant -- and that we don't just pay attention to these communities when a CVS burns, and we don't just pay attention when a young man gets shot or has his spine snapped. We're paying attention all the time because we consider those kids our kids, and we think they're important. And they shouldn't be living in poverty and violence.

That's how I feel. I think there are a lot of good-meaning people around the country that feel that way. But that kind of political mobilization I think we haven't seen in quite some time. And what I've tried to do is to promote those ideas that would make a difference. But I think we all understand that the politics of that are tough because it's easy to ignore those problems or to treat them just as a law and order issue, as opposed to a broader social issue.

That was a really long answer, but I felt pretty strongly about it