

“Challenging Mass Incarceration as a Human Rights Violation”
A project of the National Conference of Black Lawyers

The National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) has unveiled a new campaign to challenge the mass incarceration of significant sectors of the Black Community.

“Challenging Mass Incarceration” is a project that focuses on the contradictions of the criminal justice system that targets an entire racial group for potential detention and violates their fundamental human rights.

“We are not engaging in hyperbole,” explained Adjoa Aiyetoro, coordinator of the project. “We hear reports that projections of future prison capacity are sometimes based in significant part on Black birth rates or third grade reading levels. If you add to that a demonstrated correlation between disproportionate suspension of Black children from school and the criminalization of their school discipline issues, then it is easy to see what many characterize as a cradle to prison pipeline.”

The consequences of this phenomenon can reach the point of absurdity. The case of two Black women in Mississippi, known as the “Scott Sisters,” is a glaring example of a justice system gone awry. Their wrongful conviction for an \$11 robbery resulted in double life sentences that officials have refused to overturn. NCBL lawyer Chokwe Lumumba represents the women, and NCBL has made a commitment to support him in the effort to obtain their freedom.

“We are not content to take a routine approach to addressing this problem,” Aiyetoro said. “The criminalization of Black people has a long history dating back to ‘slave codes’ that regulated the movements and actions of enslaved Africans, and which set the stage for modern day racial profiling and a pervasive, baseless perception of Black people as a threat to public safety.” Aiyetoro explained that as part of its project, NCBL will educate the public about the historical context of incarceration and the place that it holds in the ongoing demand for reparations for the badges and incidences of slavery.

The project will also involve special efforts to prevent the over-incarceration of Black people from remaining America’s dirty little secret. NCBL will expose this pattern to the world by presenting findings, reports and statistics to the United Nations through its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and other forums. NCBL has a strong track record in connecting domestic issues with the broader struggle for human rights in the international arena. Most recently, NCBL was represented at the UPR process in Geneva, Switzerland by Attorney Stan Willis of Chicago on the issues of torture and political prisoners which represents another shameful side of the U.S. criminal justice system.