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Dominica Unrest Continues as Salisbury Man Alleges Police Shot Him Without Cause

Amid ongoing fallout from Dominica's electoral reform protests, Salisbury resident Egbert Roberts says police shot him at home despite no protest involvement. The March 20 unrest followed clashes in Roseau where tear gas and rubber bullets were used.

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Police with shields and tear gas ward off protesters in Dominica. The protests are tied to growing unrest over electoral reform and concerns about government accountability.

Questions about police brutality in Dominica continue to swirl days after a protest over electoral reform turned violent.

Clashes with police last Wednesday near the House of Assembly in Roseau, the nation's capital, resulted in officers deploying tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters, some of whom retaliated with hurled stones and teargas.

The next day, sections of the E.O. Leblanc Highway near the community of Salisbury were blocked, reportedly in an attempt to stymie police efforts to question former Salisbury Member of Parliament Hector John over suspicions of his involvement in the Roseau protests. Mr. John denied the allegations against him, but was nevertheless eventually arrested alongside two others, and charged with unlawful assembly.

The unrest in Salisbury continued through much of last Thursday, with authorities attempting to clear the roads and protesters replacing road blockages as they were taken down.

Along with reports that at least one police officer was injured amidst the tumult of the March 19 and 20 protests, residents have been sharply critical over the behavior of the police, who they say were unnecessarily hostile and violent.

Now, one man is telling his story of how officers who knew he had not been participating in any protest action shot him anyway, as he was walking into his house last Thursday evening.

In a special feature from local media outlet EmoNews, Egbert Roberts, a resident of Salisbury, recounted leaving his house on an errand that Thursday afternoon. He took a friend's motorcycle but found that when he was ready to return, he could not. "The heat was on," he told EmoNews reporter Emerline Anselm.

After some time, the road was cleared and so Mr. Roberts said he decided to head back home. It was sometime after 7 p.m. He had just arrived when he said he heard a voice in the darkness commanding him to park the motorcycle. "I had already parked," he noted. Immediately afterwards, he said, he heard the first shot and felt a pinch in his finger. "Then I heard after that, 'Shoot, man!'" Mr. Roberts recounted. "Right after that, another bullet in my leg right there."

Mr. Roberts said that the second bullet hit him in the knee, causing him to fall to the ground. He said that he slowly got up, and not knowing if there were more bullets coming his way, hopped up the stairs until he came to a chair just inside the doorway. He sat, blood pouring from the wound on his leg. "I didn't get shot on the street, neither in the village," he pointed out to Ms. Anselm. "I was at my home. I got shot in my yard, right by my vehicle."

His young daughter was in the house alone, and she was the one who came to his aid, Mr. Roberts said. After she called for help, some people came and helped him to a nearby health center. From there, he was transported to the hospital via ambulance, treated and discharged.

Mr. Roberts claims that none of the police officers on the street across from his home said a word to him before or after the shooting, other than instructing him to park the bike. "Nobody asked any questions. All I heard is pow, pow," he said. The officers knew that he was not a participant in the protest. When he was leaving the house earlier that afternoon, Mr. Roberts claimed to have spoken to the officers, advising that his family was inside the home and asking them to be cautious with their deployment of teargas. He expressed bewilderment that he could return home with the same clothing and the same blue motorcycle on which he left, only to be shot twice.

Since the shooting, Mr. Roberts said he has not been contacted by any law enforcement or government official. However, vehicles registered to the government have been spotted parked outside his home. “Up to last night, a bus parked there. Go, it come back, it park...9:30, 10 o'clock, it's still there,” he said. Mr. Roberts says he believes he may be under surveillance.

Now unable to work due to his injury, Mr. Roberts expressed frustration. Acknowledging that the state has the law on its side, he nevertheless insisted that his treatment went beyond the bounds of acceptability. “When you all do something like that, you all should have a heart, a conscience to turn back and follow up and say ‘I think we went wrong somewhere, let us check up on that person,’” Mr. Roberts said.

“Don't just turn your back. We are not animals,” he pleaded.

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