

JUSTICE 4 RACHID

"I keep flying the flag of hope but can't go on forever without Allah's Support and your support".

(Rachid Ramda, Political Prisoner, HMP Belmarsh)

WHO IS RACHID RAMDA?

34 year old Rachid Ramda is an Algerian asylum seeker who came to Britain in 1993.

In November of 1995, he was arrested on an extradition warrant from the French Government, which accused him of financing the 1995 Paris Metro Bombings. Over the past decade, there have been nine separate legal proceedings attempting to extradite Rachid.

In 2002, two High Court Judges quashed an extradition order signed by the Home Secretary. They pointed to the fact that the evidence against Rachid came from a co-defendant who had been mistreated in French custody. They raised serious questions that the Home Secretary should have investigated and answered before ordering extradition.

Despite this, Rachid has spent almost ten years 'languishing in the corners of the British Gulag' known as HMP Belmarsh. He spent six years in the Special Secure Unit, where his mental and physical wellbeing suffered. He was incarcerated 23 hours a day in a small cell that his solicitor described as a "concrete coffin".

Now, he is a lifeline to the other Muslims in Belmarsh and is known as Rachid 'One Brother Wonder' Ramda.

After six years in the SSU, Rachid fought for his right to education and completed an Open University Course in English literature and is now in the process of working towards a degree. He has also completed the memorisation of the Quran whilst behind bars.

'the most sweet man – the most peaceful and gentle soul? A man that has remained stoic after being detained for ten years (on remand) in a prison like Belmarsh where, for sure, one year should be counted treble?'

Fellow Detainee

Now the British government is conspiring with France to deprive Rachid of his liberty. On the 6th April 2005, the Home Office made a decision to extradite Rachid to France.

We must act now!

WHY MUST WE FIGHT THIS EXTRADITION?

- The only 'evidence' against Rachid originated from a co-defendant who was brutally mistreated by the French authorities. This man later retracted his statement and said he had been ill treated. There was clear medical and photographic evidence to show that he had been injured whilst in police custody and before he made his "statement". Therefore, this 'evidence' is highly unreliable and misleading and should not be used in any trial that claims to be fair.
- The case to extradite him was quashed in June 2002, but the judge left the Home Office with a number of questions. It has taken three years for the Home Office to write 8 pages which contain no answers to these questions. No new 'evidence' has been submitted.
- The ruling from the Home Office regarding their decision to extradite him wasn't faxed to Belmarsh prison as the Home Office claimed, and as yet, Rachid has not received any formal notification of this decision. Had his solicitor not been able to inform him, he would have missed the deadline for appeal.

- He is subject to the petty, morale breaking tactics of the prison authorities. Often his letters to his friends and family do not reach them and phone calls to his extended family are denied him.
 - Rachid's physical and mental health has suffered terribly as a result of his decade long detention in Belmarsh prison, especially the first six years spent in the SSU confined to a small space where he was immobile. He has had no visits from his family during these last ten years. His mother's repeated attempts to receive a visa to the UK have been denied on 12 occasions.
- "I have constant pain in my joints, especially my knees, ankles, shoulders and even my elbows. My sight has been decreased because of the overuse of artificial light. Loss of memory sometimes and lack of concentration most of the time."*
- The treatment of Muslim suspects in France is notoriously bad. In a recent report, Amnesty International noted a pattern emerging of an increase in police violence, deaths in custody and torture. The victims are predominantly Muslims of North African origin. Furthermore, these incidences for the most part have been overlooked and the French Government has not to date introduced any mechanism to ensure such abuses are checked and promptly investigated. Amnesty International is concerned about France's failure to abide by its obligations under the UN convention against torture, particularly in the area of its law enforcement agencies.
 - France boasts some of the most draconian anti terrorist policies in Europe, whereby suspects can be remanded in custody for extreme lengths of time before a trial or while an investigation is pending. Again, the worst abuses are directed against Muslims.
 - If he is extradited to France, Rachid is under real threat of removal without safeguards to Algeria. If this happened, it would be probable that he would be brutally tortured or killed.
 - Rachid maintains his innocence and non-involvement in the crimes that he is accused of. Former Algerian Secret Service agents admitted that the bombings of 1995 were orchestrated by the Algerian junta in an attempt to galvanise French public opinion against Algerian Islamists. Thus, Rachid is but a pawn in a political game, and he has lost ten years of his life in detention because of this.
 - **Rachid is a political prisoner. Do not let him continue to suffer this cruel injustice.**

ACTION PLAN

- Write a letter to the Home Office regarding Rachid's case.
- Write to Rachid to remind him that he has not been forgotten at this critical time when his spirits are unsurprisingly low. Please bear in mind that it will be difficult for Rachid to reply to any mail he receives.
- Check www.stoppoliticalterror.com and www.cageprisoners.com for news of demonstrations and more action alerts regarding Rachid

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