



Another Sad Anniversary

On 11 December 2004, Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh would have been forced to waste 9 years of their young lives in jail since their wrongful conviction in 1996 for a crime they did not commit. This is 2,921 days, on top of the 360 and 618 days spent by Samar and Jawad respectively just to get to trial! As with our brothers and sisters suffering Israeli imprisonment, we don't know whether we are to celebrate their somoud or resistance, or to grieve over the fact they have been stuck or mas-moudin all those long years. There is no doubt that over the years, the Campaign Freedom & Justice for Samar & Jawad has grown in strength and outreach, here and abroad. For example, we have secured the support of UNISON, Britain's largest trade union with over 1.3 million members. We have reached over 75 MPs, as well as several MEPs and Lords. Amnesty International continues to monitor the case and to repeat its belief that Samar & Jawad's convictions were unsafe and that they were denied the right to a fair trial. The media now calls Samar & Jawad students, not terrorists, and even asked about the feelings of the families during the appeal. The authorities continue to rebuff any approaches with at times disdain for the lives at stake. 10 years on, the Home Secretary was still happy to state in parliament that "It was never established where the car bombs were assembled or who drove the cars", while making no efforts to answer any of the key questions about the July 2004 bombings. 3 years after losing the appeal, there are still no efforts to address the intelligence failures and the "human errors" that led to the intelligence services, police and prosecution to suppress vital evidence from the trial judge in 1994, and to everyone else up and until now, i.e. for 10 years! In the context of the current "war on terror", perhaps it is not so surprising that the intelligence services are allowed to act as judge and jury no matter what. People can be deemed terrorists and guilty whenever necessary, and so long as political motives require it. 10 years on, we cannot accept that justice punishes the innocent and leaves the guilty unscathed. And that for dubious political motives, including covering up failures by government departments. But the legal battle is unlikely to lead to

anything before 2006-2007. The application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is in the queue, but we have another year or so of waiting. The ECHR has repeatedly ruled against the UK government that the failure to disclose vital evidence to the trial judge, if not the defence, is a breach of fairness of trial. The application to the Criminal Cases Review Commission CCRC, the body responsible for referring miscarriages of justice to the Appeal Court, is due in winter 2005. A referral by the CCRC to the high court is not guaranteed, and even if it happens, the process may take a year or more. 9 years on, Samar and Jawad have moved closer to more open conditions, but continue to be faced with blatant racism and discrimination. In 1998-1999, it was said that de-categorising Samar and Jawad might upset the Middle East process. Now, it's the "international political climate"! So if you are an Arab or Muslim, your rights can be denied and you can rot in jail for years on end. The attitude revealed by the repeated rejections and reference to the "political climate" imply that the two are irredeemable animals who will always be dangerous to the public. One of Samar's pen friends told her: "Years ago your case seemed to be an exception now it seems the rule for treating us in Europe. What's more, years ago they suppressed evidence, now they are dispensing with evidence and any legal process altogether!". It was sad for us to watch the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that prevailed in our community back in 1995-1996 spread to most other Arab and Muslim communities. It was equally appalling that the presumption of guilt has become the norm. However, it seems people from all walks of life are waking up and standing up to the attacks on civil liberties and the targeting of our communities. In particular, the 17 people detained indefinitely in Belmarsh and Woodhill are being buried alive in practice, but at least this is no longer being done in secret. The wrong-doing has been exposed to day light, even if not cured. It remains important for the Palestinian community to show some solidarity with Samar & Jawad. I call on the community to dedicate its next Annual dinner to Samar, Jawad, and the other 8000 Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel. There are also

many simple things that people can do individually, including:- signing our petition on <http://www.petitiononline.com/FreeSaj/petition.html> find out more about the case by visiting our website on www.freesaj.org.uk there are 3 booklets about the case: "Justice Denied" (covering 1996-1999), "Cover up Confirmed" (2000-2001), "Infinite Injustice" (July 2002)- joining the campaign either by going on line to our website on www.freesaj.org.uk or by writing to: Freedom & Justice for Samar & Jawad, BM Box FOSA, London WC1N 3XX- Making a donation (Cheques payable to FOSA) through our website or by mail.- Writing to Samar & Jawad: Samar Alami (RL1436), HMP Send, Ripley Road, Woking GU23 7LJ, Jawad Botmeh (EP3888), Carling Unit, HMP Rye Hill, Onley Park, Willoughby, Nr Rugby CV23. ■

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*My land, my spirit I am a 100 women,
1000s of lives. You robbed my land, soiled
its fruits and bounties, its treasures. Who do
you think you are? Stop looking at me like
that. Stop talking at me like that. There
should have never been any slave. My beauty
needs to be free. Plunder, exploitation, domi-
nation, Plots and machinations. These are your
ravages. This is no civilization. My days are
yet to come. I may spill and shed
blood, sweat and tears. But seeds of today
will grow into the lush, gracious, giving
trees of a brighter tomorrow. Hopes and
dreams fly away as birds. No shackle can hold
them. No blackmail contain them. My pains
are more than skin deep. But nothing on
Earth will stop my spirit being free. You
can't touch me . . . And our world will out-
last you. . . I don't belong to you. I owe you
nothing. And you don't own me. I'm stripped
naked. But the shame is on you.—*

Randa Alami