

Pennsylvania prison headquarters padlock doors to keep Mumia supporters out

written by Andre Powell
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Pam Africa, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and Suzanne Ross. Photo: freemumia.com

On July 23, supporters of Mumia Abu-Jamal from up and down the East Coast

gathered at Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections headquarters in Mechanicsville, Pa., to deliver petitions to the department head requesting that they give Mumia the medical treatment he needs.

In her statement, Suzanne Ross of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal detailed the current problems that have led to a loss of vision for Abu-Jamal. She attempted to persuade Capitol police to allow a three-person delegation into the headquarters. The group of supporters, including Pam Africa, had traveled from New York City, Philadelphia, Delaware and Baltimore.

Originally told they would be allowed in, the police later told the group that the department head was no longer in the building. They then refused to ask the second in command to come to the door to get the petitions, insisting instead that the petitions had to be left with them.

The police went as far as padlocking the doors to prevent them from getting in, even though no one had even attempted to get past the four of them. As a result of the padlocked door, the police were forced to turn away both FedEx and a second delivery person effectively shutting down the building. Mumia supporters vowed to return with a larger group of supporters.

Pam Africa, representing the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, exclaimed that protesters will make sure that the secretary of corrections, John Wetzel, hears our demands. "We will go wherever he is at," she said.

Mumia Abu-Jamal has been in prison for over 37 years, framed for the death of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Jamal's real "crime" in the eyes of authorities was to be a journalist exposing police brutality, and earlier as a teenager, a member of Philadelphia's Black Panther Party chapter.

He was saved from death row by a tremendous campaign of support for two decades that resulted in the death sentence being overturned. His guilty conviction, however, was allowed to stand and was converted to life in prison.

Efforts to get a new trial due to prosecutorial misconduct continue. His first trial was noted for the overwhelmingly racial bias of Judge Albert Sabo and prosecutor Joseph McGill.

Despite having been Philadelphia's district attorney during some of Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeals, former Pennsylvania state Supreme Court Justice Ronald Castille ruled against Abu-Jamal in subsequent court cases. Proper ethics rules should have called for Castille to recuse himself from those hearings. Mumia continues to maintain his innocence to this day.

Supporters around the world will continue to fight for proper medical treatment for Mumia Abu-Jamal's vision just as they previously fought for treatment of his hepatitis C. Every fight that is won for Mumia's medical care is also a victory in the ongoing battle to force the state of Pennsylvania to provide proper medical care to all of its prisoners.

