



**STILL ON DEATH ROW WITH TROY DAVIS:
DEFENDING LIFE AND JUSTICE**
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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Say what you want or will, there is something ethically savage and socially unseemly about engaging in official killing, given that it violates the sacredness of human life; is irreversible; discounts the human tendency to make mistakes and the race and class character of justice in determining innocence and guilt; and is irrational in its claim to stop and deter killing by killing officially. And if we add to this early-man sense of “justice” the morally monstrous practice of killing the innocent, because they are vulnerable and convenient victims, it takes even a more cavish, cruel and callous turn.

Such is the case and precarious position of Mr. Troy A. Davis, a vulnerable and convenient victim of the Georgia and U.S. systems of justice with their race and class biases and their addiction to dealing death as an official and honored practice. Mr. Davis, an African American, sits now on death row in Georgia, waiting again for the fourth time, to learn whether he will live or die, have his sentence commuted, be exonerated and let free or be killed as a result of an unjust and wrongful conviction for a murder of a White police officer, which the evidence argues he did not commit. Indeed, there was no DNA evidence or murder weapon presented by the prosecution; seven of the nine witnesses have since recanted and at least ten witnesses have identified another suspect. Some have cited police coercion as the source of their false testimonies; and others have said another man has admitted to the killing for which Mr. Davis was charged. One of the two hold-out witnesses said he only saw the shooter’s clothes and that he

was left-handed, although Troy is right-handed and the other hold-out is a suspect himself which other witnesses have identified.

Mr. Davis’ case has wound its way thru numerous judges, reviews and rulings since his wrongful conviction in 1991, taking its heavy toll on him and his family, especially the *three times* before when he has been brought to the brink of being executed and the execution was stayed almost literally at the last moment, coming one time within 90 minutes of his being killed. His case, from the beginning, was clearly problematic and pockmarked with flaws and prejudicial profiling and prosecution. As much as we might want, work and even pray for a post-racial society and use of the President to “prove” it, it is the long history of racism and its daily disabling and deadly practice that undermine our illusions and force us to face its pervasive presence and persistence.

It cannot be easy to live daily under threat of imminent death, to have said goodbye to family, friends and supporters three times before and to have waited to be walked to the chamber of horrors called the execution room and there have your life taken even though you are innocent and now face all this again. And so one can only admire the internal strength of Troy Davis, what he calls his “never ending faith”. In a letter to his supporters some time ago, he talks of that foundational faith that sustains and uplifts him and makes him tell us, “I am in a place where execution can only destroy your physical form, but because of my faith in God, my family and all of you (supporters) I have been spiritually free for some time and no matter what happens in

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the days (and) weeks to come, this Movement to end the death penalty, to seek true justice, to expose a system that fails to protect the innocent must be accelerated”.

For he says, “There are so many Troy Davis’ ”. And “this fight to end the death penalty is not won or lost through me, but through our strength to move forward and save every innocent person in captivity around the globe”. Prepared for the worst during his last ordeal, he nevertheless hoped for the best declaring at the end of his letter, “I can’t wait to stand with you no matter if that is in physical or spiritual form. I will one day be announcing ‘I AM TROY DAVIS, and I AM FREE. Never Stop Fighting for Justice and We Will Win.’”

His life and letter are a model and mirror of the unbreakable human spirit, of a victorious consciousness, and the refusal to be less than the ancestors’ definition of us in the fullness of our humanity as bearers of dignity and divinity, worthy of the highest respect. And it also reminds us of the sacred teachings of the *Odu Ifa* (43:1) that says “even if we are going to die, we must wage a life-and-death struggle”. For thru struggle we strengthen ourselves and open the way to victory, justice and the good we all desire and deserve.

Bro. Troy also rightly pays homage to his sister, Martina Correia, saying he marvels at her love for him, worries about her health and knows “she will not back down from this fight to save my life and prove to the world that I am innocent of this terrible crime.” Reminding us of the internal strength and struggle of Fannie Lou Hamer

and our other heroic foremothers, Sis. Martina refuses to tire, talk defeat or be dispirited. A cancer survivor who, she notes, feels the “effects of 7 ½ years of constant chemotherapy”, she says in a letter to supporters, she remains steadfast and still “prayerful and hopeful”, determined and working daily to exonerate her brother and bring him home.

Having exhausted all appeals, Bro. Troy is scheduled to be executed next week, even though evidence supports his innocence. However, on Monday, September 19th, Bro. Troy will have a final hearing before the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles. They can stop the execution and commute his sentence, and prevent a wrongful execution and gross injustice. Thus, campaigns have been launched, especially by the NAACP, to petition the Board for clemency for Bro. Troy. And we should all send e-mails and sign petitions supporting these efforts and urge others to do likewise.

Introducing herself in one of her letters to supporters, Bro. Troy’s sister says, “My name is Martina Correia and I’m on death row because that is where my brother lives”. Indeed, we are all on death row with Troy Davis, struggling and strengthening him and each other, resolutely defending his right to life and justice. And we do this so that justice can be done, the death penalty can be defeated and the sacredness of life can have presence and power beyond our sacred books and the various circles that hypocritically read and recite them and then act otherwise.

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