

# PRISONERS OF FAITH CAMPAIGN PACK



## Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman

**WARNING:** Some of the contents of this report deal with torture and may cause distress

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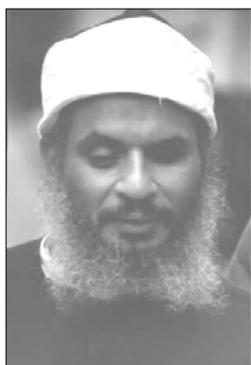
'I am being tried because of my beliefs in Islam...I am honoured to join those in jail...for a just cause.'<sup>1</sup>

Sheikh Omar's address to the court, after he was handed down a life sentence, along with 9 other defendants, on 17 January 1996.

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<sup>1</sup> Tahir Mahmoud, 'US's Legal Farce Ends in Long Jail Terms', Crescent International, 1 – 15 February 1996.

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Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman,  
1986, before imprisonment

## Introduction

Assalaam alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh

Dear Brothers and Sisters

It has been estimated that there are approximately 250,000 Muslim prisoners of faith around the world today, held in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. They can be politicians, members of human rights organisations, students, writers, actors and indeed come from all spheres of life, but have one thing in common in that they have wished to adhere to the Islamic belief and way of life. The government of the country where the prisoners of faith are held often portrays them as terrorists, inciters of religious hatred or of even trying to change the constitution of the country. Once locked away, it is all too easy to forget about these prisoners of faith, who can be subjected to the most extreme and brutal forms of torture. Despite the various human rights treaties which have been ratified by governments to protect the right of an individual not to be subjected to torture and the countless UN resolutions banning its use, this practice still continues, largely ignored by the international community. The right not to be tortured is non-derogable, meaning in all situations even in a state of emergency this right must be guaranteed.

**IHRC's prisoner of faith campaigns have been running since the organisation began and continue and complement the work of many dedicated campaigns world-wide. More packs will be made available. Please check our website and go to the campaigns page at [www.ihrc.org.uk](http://www.ihrc.org.uk) or contact us via email at [info@ihrc.org](mailto:info@ihrc.org).**

## The Letter Writing Campaign

IHRC's campaign for prisoners of faith is based on a letter writing campaign. We have found this to be an effective method of applying pressure to different governmental organisations, (national and international), bodies such as the United Nations, European Commission of Human Rights and other similar organisations. They are currently failing to exert pressure on member countries which have pledged to uphold human rights values.

Questions that have been asked in the past concerning the campaign have included:

- What difference will one letter make?
- Does it really work?
- Will we get in trouble writing the letters, since *they* will have our contact details?

It is true that one letter may end up being ignored by the recipient. At least the person who sent it will be able to answer on the Day of Judgement that s/he made a stand against injustice to try to help the prisoners. However letters sent in their hundreds cannot be ignored. One MP stated that if his constituency receives even five letters on the same topic, a meeting is convened to answer the question at hand. Of course this may be the policy of one of the "better" MPs, but the fact remains that hundreds of letters demanding to know why a certain prisoner of faith is being detained and tortured for no other reason than wishing to practice his/her religion must generate a response which can then be taken further.

In fact it was due to a sustained letter writing campaign that the Turkish journalist Gul Aslan, held for three years without charge in Bandirma prison was released in August 1999; the judge presiding over her trial stated that her case was an international embarrassment. Thousands of prisoners of faith have also been released in Bahrain, India and Nigeria after similar campaigns.

Huda Kaya, whilst held in Malatya Prison in July 1999, after participating in a rally against the hijab ban, wrote the following to IHRC:

“We are so proud to see that you are interested in the problems of Muslims in Turkey who are living the basic principle of Islam that only the momineen are brothers...Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a strong and compact wall (Surah Saff-4/Holy Qur'an)...And again by using IHRC, I am sending salaam to all those valuable momineen brothers and sisters. WE ARE WAITING FOR YOUR LETTERS.”

Al-Hamdullillah, Huda Kaya and her daughters who faced the death penalty for participating in the rally were released from prison in December 1999.

Many people do feel slightly apprehensive about writing letters to different governmental organisations about prisoners of faith. Letter writing is a tool widely used by human rights organisations and is a fundamental basic right aligned to freedom of speech.

Model letters are provided for each of the prisoners of faith, which can be sent directly or adjusted as necessary to include further details. We ask that if you do receive a reply to send **a copy of the letter sent (even if it is the model letter) and the reply to IHRC**. This is extremely important as it helps IHRC to monitor the situation with regards to the prisoner of faith and to improve upon the current model letters. Please also keep letters polite.

Letter writing campaigns take time to become established, but Insha'Allah further results will be obtained. However, the success of the campaign is dependent upon the number of people committing to it. More campaigners need to get involved, on a regular basis. The campaign can then be extended to include e.g. vigils and protests at different embassies to raise awareness and Insha'Allah obtain the release of the prisoner of faith.

Finally we ask you to remember these and the many thousand other prisoners of faith in your du'as – imprisoned simply for their beliefs.

## Why Campaign with the Islamic Human Rights Commission?

As Muslims, we have an undeniable responsibility to struggle against oppression and injustice, and to work for a world based on principles of equity and compassion. To do so, Muslims must first of all be aware of the current state of affairs in the world at large, an obligation that has been indicated by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as follows: “Whoever wakes up in the morning not thinking about the affairs of the Ummah (community) is not one of us.” (Muslim)

The Qur’an clearly points out that Muslims must fight against oppression in all forms, be it against Muslim or non-Muslim: *“And what reason have you that you should not fight in the way of Allah and of the weak among the men, women and children (of) those who say: Our Lord! Cause us to go forth from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee a helper.”* (Qur’an 4:75) This verse shows that Muslims have a responsibility to aid the oppressed regardless of the faith or ethnicity of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Indeed, the Prophet (SAW) has clearly stated that refusing to struggle against oppression and injustice could be tantamount to becoming an oppressor and even exiting the fold of Islam. “Whoever goes along with an oppressor and strengthens his hands, knowing that he is an oppressor, has taken himself out of the fold of Islam.” (from ‘Awwāz ibn Sharāhbil, by al-Bayhaqi in his *Shu’ab al-Iman*; cited in *Mishkat* (1381 AH), Vol. 2, p. 641:5136) “Whoever sees something wrong should use his strength to set it right; if he cannot, he should speak against it; and if he cannot it, he should at least consider it wrong in his heart; and this is the weakest of faith.” (Muslim, from Abu Sa’id al-Khudri, Vol. 1, p. 69:78, *Kitab al-Iman*)

Thus, it is clear that genuine adherence to Islam inherently entails committed activism against all forms of injustice and oppression. This includes standing up against those who perpetrate and promulgate injustice regardless of whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, and striving to protect the rights of all people from oppression once more regardless of ethnicity or religion.

The question then arises as to the best methodology we should implement to fulfil the obligation outlined above. Once more, the Qur’an and the Prophet (SAW) have made clear the best means of doing so. First of all, the Qur’an states that it is an obligation for Muslims to form groups or organisations through which they may exhort to what is right and denounce wrong: *“Let there be among you a group that invites to the good, enjoins what is right and forbids what is evil, and they are those who are successful.”* (Qur’an 3:104) In other words, Muslims should form structured organisations through which they can call upon all relevant parties to implement justice and avoid injustice - the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) strives to be just such an organisation. This is a universal obligation that Muslims have been commanded to fulfil by Allah (SWT) in relation to all individuals, communities and groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim without exception. This therefore necessarily includes calling on international organisations such as the United Nations and NATO; national organisations such as human rights groups and think-tanks; governments and non-governmental organisations; state and non-state institutions; and so on, to implement justice and avoid injustice. It is the obligation of Muslims to make significant contact with all such national and international bodies to encourage and exhort them to practice justice, and finally to denounce and condemn any of their unjust practices.

Indeed, the Prophet (SAW) has quite specifically highlighted the merits of speaking out directly to the perpetrator or supporter of oppression. This is done by condemning their oppressive behaviour, recommending to them the most just practice in relation to this behaviour, and calling upon them to reform their behaviour according to justice by implementing this recommendation. The Prophet (SAW) stated: “The best Jihad is the word of truth spoken in the presence of a tyrant ruler” (narrated by Ahmad). Indeed, this sort of direct activism against oppression may not necessarily be literal and physical. Research and campaigning through writing in order to fulfil the obligation outlined above has also been highly praised by the Prophet (SAW), and therefore must include contacting relevant groups and organisations to demand that they adhere to justice. This has been directly alluded to in the

statement of the Prophet (SAW) quoted above: “Whoever sees something wrong should use his strength to set it right; if he cannot, he should speak against it...”

The next question with regards to methodology is how to call upon these groups, bodies and organisations in an effective and convincing manner. It is well known that when the Prophets (AS) fulfilled their mission to preach the message of Islam to the different communities to which they came, they did so deliberately in a language and terminology which they could best understand. In other words, they gauged the intellectual and rational background of their listeners and tailored their preaching so that listeners were able to comprehend the Prophets’ message.

This has even entailed utilising the ideology of the listeners in such a way as to use the concepts and terminology which they are already familiar with, to prove a correct concept. For example, the Qur’an relates that Prophet Ibrahim (AS), in conversation with his people, utilised the concepts and terminology of the paganist worldview to prove the Islamic worldview. (*Qur’an* 6:75-79, 7:80-83, 41:47)

In a similar fashion, it is possible to highlight the unjust practices of governments, organisations and individuals using concepts and terminology that they understand - such as the prevailing human rights discourse - so as to prove their unjust nature. The objective of doing so would simply be to demonstrate their hypocrisy in failing to adhere to the very humanitarian principles which they themselves claim to uphold, by pointing out the discrepancy between their behaviour and the basic rights of human beings.

Where the Divinely-ordained rights of human beings correlate with rights recognised internationally, it makes sense to call upon national and international bodies to implement such rights. This would serve greatly to help fulfil our Islamic responsibility to struggle against global injustice and oppression, to protect the intrinsic rights of Muslims worldwide, and to promote justice and equity. In this way, we would be pressuring existing international instruments to act in accordance with justice. As the Prophet stated in a famous hadith: “The similitude of the believers is like a single body. If any part of it complains of an injury, the entire body responds.” Campaigning with IHRC can help make this response effective.

There are many examples proving that Muslim pressure can have an impact. For example, the Zionist Lord Michael Levy was temporarily sidelined from his position as Tony Blair’s Middle East envoy. This occurred in the wake of the Foreign Office having received up to over a thousand letters from IHRC campaigners. Lord Levy’s sidelining was widely reported in the press by newspapers such as the *Times* and the *Independent*. Although Lord Levy was later returned to his position, it remains clear that this sort of pressure can work.

Similarly, when a number of Turkish Sisters were jailed for undertaking a peaceful protest against the ban on Hijab in schools and universities, IHRC volunteers were asked to send letters to several organisations and leaders, including Mary Robinson, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Turkish sisters, who had the death sentence levelled against them, were soon released when the UN intervened under pressure from IHRC campaigners to prevent them from being killed.

Another recent example is that of Oxfam, when it announced that it will not renew its contract with pro-Zionist Starbucks after immense pressure from various human rights groups led by IHRC.

Yet another example is that of the recent success in the case of Mirza Tahir Hussain whose imminent death sentence was commuted owing to great efforts by many governmental bodies and co-ordinated by IHRC.

There are many other examples. Campaigning can work if enough consistent, determined and widespread pressure can be imposed on political leaders and organisations. IHRC believes that it is our

responsibility to call these leaders and organisations to account for their policies and actions, and to exhort them to act in accordance with justice.

## Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman

### Background

Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman was born in El Gamalia, Egypt in 1938. He lost his eyesight when he was an infant, at the age of 10 months. In his early childhood, he used to go to the mosque with his nephew to study the Quran. When he was 5 years old, he enrolled in a school for the blind and learned Braille, and by the age of 11 years he had become a hafiz. His nephew, who would accompany him everyday after Fajr to study Islamic lessons, played a big supporting role in helping Sheikh Omar achieve this.

He studied at Al-Azhar in Cairo and graduated with highest honours in 1965. In 1968, he started teaching at Al-Azhar, and delivering sermons in mosques in El Faiyum, where he was also an Imam in one of the mosques. He used to openly condemn Jamal Abdel Nasser's regime in his lectures. His criticisms increased to the point that he was removed from his post at Al-Azhar.

In 1972, he obtained his PhD from the College of Principles of Religion, Department of Qur'anic Commentary. As part of his PhD he completed a five volume thesis on the Muslim duty of Jihad, which according to his current attorney Ramsey Clark, (former attorney general of the US), many would have found a controversial area for a thesis, fearing persecution.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, he was offered to teach at Al-Azhar again, hence he taught at the university for four more years.

### Arrests in Egypt

Sheikh Omar was first arrested and imprisoned in 1970 in Egypt after he had told members of his congregation at *Juma* (Friday) prayers that it was forbidden to pray for the deceased Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser. He was released on 10 June 1971 and testified to being tortured and beaten during his imprisonment. In his sermons Sheikh Omar spoke of the *Sharia* (the Islamic code of laws) as being the solution to the problems of the Muslims, whilst repeatedly condemning government policies propagating practices deemed unacceptable by Islam, widespread under the governments of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak.

After the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in October 1981, Sheikh Omar was arrested and accused of calling for Sadat's assassination as well as belonging to a "jihad" organisation. He was tried in a military court. Nevertheless, he was successful in defending himself against all charges, and left the prison camp in October 1984, only to find himself arrested two years later in 1986. This time, with another 100 defendants he was charged with conspiring to overthrow the state. Again he was acquitted.

### Trial in US

In 1990, Sheikh Omar left Egypt for the United States of America to serve as imam of a mosque in Brooklyn. A year later his green card was cancelled and procedures for his deportation began.<sup>3</sup>

The World Trade Centre was bombed on 26 February 1993. In October 1995, a New York jury found Sheikh Omar guilty on all five counts as charged of seditious conspiracy against the US government, solicitation to murder Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, conspiracy to murder Mubarak, conspiracy

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<sup>2</sup> Ramsey Clark (former Attorney General of the US), 'Will Justice Be Done in Shaikh Omar's Case?', (published by Jamaat al-Muslimeen)

<sup>3</sup> Lynne F Stewart, 'Omar Abdel Rahman: A Brief Biographical Sketch', *The Abd' Al Rahman Report*, July, August, September 1995

to bomb and solicitation to bomb a US military installation.<sup>4</sup> He was charged under US sedition laws not used since the civil war.

In fact the FBI and Egyptian intelligence agencies had begun investigating Sheikh Omar almost as soon as he arrived into the USA, seeking refuge from persecution from his native Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Although under constant FBI surveillance he was arrested in July 1993, for being a “danger to the community” and posing “a risk of flight”.<sup>6</sup> However the reasons given for his arrest were for immigration charges. He was strip-searched and kept in solitary confinement without any medical aid for his diabetes.<sup>7</sup>

In the same month, a meeting was convened between a US ambassador and the Egyptian Foreign Minister, where “...recent actions in the United States with respect to Omar Abdel Rahman” were discussed.<sup>8</sup> Procedures were already under way in the US for the Sheikh to be deported, as his green card had been rescinded in 1991 and he was currently being detained for immigration charges. By US law he would have been allowed to leave for a third country which worried the Egyptian officials so they, in turn requested his extradition. However, extradition charges did not exist. The following month in August, a series of tapes prepared by an Egyptian FBI spy named Emad Salem were revealed. The contents revealed secretly taped conversations between Emad Salem and Sheikh Omar or other Muslims, which were disclosed and used at the end of August to indict the Sheikh and 14 others in the World Trade Centre bombings and for conspiracy to bomb other New York landmarks.<sup>9</sup>

For the trial, Sheikh Omar had asked civil rights lawyers William Knustler and Ronald Kuby, who were already defending several others in the case to represent him as well. The two attorneys filed a motion asking for the dismissal of the judge who was to preside over the trial, Judge Michael B Mukasey, a known Zionist. They argued that Judge Mukasey, whose wife worked for a school which actively supported *aliyah* (the immigration of the world’s Jews to Israel), would not be impartial over a trial of defendants, the majority of whom were of Arab lineage.<sup>10</sup> The motion was denied and in November 1993 Judge Mukasey prohibited both attorneys from representing Sheikh Omar. Instead, the federal court appointed attorney Lynne F. Stewart to represent Sheikh Omar. In early 2005, Ms Stewart was wrongfully convicted for supporting terrorism. Hence, Mr Clark is the current attorney for Sheikh Omar.

## Violations

Several other serious violations during the investigation and trial of all the defendants and Sheikh Omar were well documented at the time:

- It was vital that the media hype, full of both anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment after the bombings did not bias the jury, but several questions that would help determine whether potential jurors could be affected in this was which submitted by Sheikh Omar’s defence during jury selection were ignored by the judge.<sup>11</sup>
- Mahmoud Abouhalima, who often attended Sheikh Omar’s lectures in New York, was one of four defendants who had been arrested in March 1993 after the bombings. Whilst in Egypt in March 1993, he was arrested by security forces, blindfolded, taken to an unknown location and tortured.

<sup>4</sup> Committee to Free Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 2 October 1995

<sup>5</sup> Ramsey Clark (former Attorney General of the US), ‘Will Justice Be Done in Shaikh Omar’s Case?’, (published by Jamaat al-Muslimeen)

<sup>6</sup> ‘Guilty Until Proven Innocent The Case of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman’, Islam on Trial

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Case of Omar Abdel Rahman: A Timeline of Developments’, *The Abd’ Al Rahman Report*, July, August, September 1995

<sup>8</sup> ‘Guilty Until Proven Innocent The Case of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman’, Islam on Trial

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Committee to Free Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 2 October 1995

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

He was asked about the world trade centre bombings; a confession extracted under torture stated that Sheikh Omar was told of the bombing plans and approved of them. Mahmoud Abouhalima was handed over to FBI officials on his return to America, where an FBI doctor confirmed that bruises and burn marks were present over his body. He was convicted with three others, each receiving 240 years in prison.<sup>12</sup>

- FBI agent Emad Salem had illegally recorded several tapes (known as bootleg tapes since the FBI did not know they were being recorded) and doctored several recordings between himself and Egyptian intelligence officials once he discovered they may be used by the defence in the trial.<sup>13</sup> He was paid over \$1 million by the US for his work in the case.<sup>14</sup>
- Repeated attempts were made to link Sheikh Omar with El Sayed Nosair, who was tried and acquitted of murdering Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1992.<sup>15</sup>
- During the trial, Judge Mukasey barred the defence from presenting three experts to testify on the meanings of Islamic terminology used during the trial. Words including *jihad*, *bayaa*, *istikhara* etc taken from Sheikh Omar's lecture tapes and sermons were obviously not everyday terminology, so the defence sought to clarify this by Islamic experts. Judge Mukasey claimed the experts' testimony would "confuse the jury".<sup>16</sup>

Although the Sheikh had been blind almost since birth, could only read Arabic braille, suffered from diabetes and heart disease and was unfamiliar with the American geography let alone knowing the whereabouts of the landmarks in New York, this did not make a difference to the US government. His attorney Ramsey Clark said of the trial "From its opening...the government appealed to fear and prejudice, telling the jury time and time again...Dr Abdel Rahman sought to kill Christians and Jews, to destroy Israel and the United States...If our law has any role in the protection of fundamental human rights, this conviction must be reversed."<sup>17</sup> Sheikh Omar had admitted to wanting to overthrow the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak but by peaceful means only. According to the committee set up to free him, he was not found guilty of any act, but rather for his thoughts, speech and writings which were highly critical of Hosni Mubarak's regime.

Therefore when, Sheikh Omar was found guilty of the five aforementioned charges his defence team were not surprised and stated "We expected convictions, but not to such an overwhelming extent".<sup>18</sup>

## Detention

Sheikh Omar said after the verdict that he was not the first, nor would he be the last to be imprisoned for his beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

Before he was handed down his sentence, Sheikh Omar delivered a speech from his prison cell for the Muslim *Ummah* (community). He said,

'I have legally obtained an entry visa to the US, and later became a lawful permanent resident and then I entered and departed, came and went, and moved throughout the US east to west. If

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> 'Emad Salem: FBI Spy Cum Egyptian Intelligence Operative', *The Abd' Al Rahman Report*, July, August, September 1995

<sup>14</sup> Ramsey Clark (former Attorney General of the US), 'Will Justice Be Done in Shaikh Omar's Case?', (published by Jamaat al-Muslimeen)

<sup>15</sup> Committee to Free Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 2 October 1995

<sup>16</sup> 'Zionist Judge Bars Major Defense Witnesses', *The Abd' Al Rahman Report*, July, August, September 1995

<sup>17</sup> Ramsey Clark (former Attorney General of the US), 'Will Justice Be Done in Shaikh Omar's Case?', (published by Jamaat al-Muslimeen)

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Defence Attorney Abdeen Jabara, Committee to Free Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 2 October 1995

<sup>19</sup> Committee to Free Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, 2 October 1995

I had committed any crime, I would not have travelled the way I did, but actually I would have fled...

‘...they did not allow us to bring an Islamic scholar (as an expert witness) to attest that my words are but the words of Islam, the Quran and the noble Messenger, and what Allah has ordered...

‘I only teach Islam in schools, universities and mosques. It is my only profession. Then the prosecution distorted the facts, manipulated the intent of my words and barred the jury from listening and knowing about what Islam and Quran really are saying.

‘The prosecution has no evidence to present against me. It is impossible that I can build a bomb, or put one anywhere. That is not my profession. That is not the profession of a Muslim preacher. I could do that neither physically nor by virtue of my position as a Muslim scholar. That confirms that the attack in this case was only on Islam.

‘The whole focus, activity and concern in my life is teaching Islam. I tell people in schools and mosques what the Quran says. And I tell couples how to resolve their marital problems. I advise businessmen about valid and prohibited transactions in earnings and profits. All that I have done is teach Islam.’<sup>20</sup>

He was given a life sentence without the chance for parole and detained in solitary confinement. He was not allowed to pray *Juma* (Friday prayers) or any other congregational prayers. Many times when the Sheikh recited the Quran in prison, the prison guards played loud music in disrespect. He was not allowed any contact with the outside world, and rarely received any visitors. Every time he did have a visitor, he was subjected to strip searches. He was only allowed a five-minute phone call to his family once a month. He has been physically abused on many occasions. In addition to this he was routinely subjected to degrading treatment such as internal examinations<sup>21</sup> and reportedly suffered from gangrene in one of his legs.

After Sheikh Omar’s detention, Mr Clark wrote a letter of appeal to the prison authorities which revealed that Sheikh Omar had become significantly weak in prison, was constantly tired due to sleeplessness and suffered from ‘headaches and organ pains’.<sup>22</sup> His condition was further exacerbated by the ‘poor air quality and bad odours’<sup>23</sup> in the cell in which he was confined. Sheikh Omar went on many voluntary fasts as a protest against his inhumane conditions. Mr Clark further stated, ‘It would be difficult to devise a crueller plan to kill him.’<sup>24</sup>

After the 9/11 attacks, restrictions on the Sheikh were further increased and all contact between the Sheikh and his family was cut off.

In December 2001, Minnesota’s 1<sup>st</sup> District Rep. Gil Gutknecht called upon the Federal Bureau of Prisons to move Sheikh Omar to a secret location, claiming his presence puts the residents of Rochester in danger. His request was denied but Gutknecht maintained he will see the Sheikh moved, suggesting he could be “kept at a military base in a prison-type facility”. He further added those suspected of or convicted of terrorism are typically not US citizens so they do not have the same rights as American prisoners.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Shaikh Omar, Undaunted, Condemns America’s War on Islam,’ Special Report, Crescent International, 1 – 15 February 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, ‘The Sheikh’s Letter from Prison’, <http://www.islam.co.za/saiin/letter.html>

<sup>22</sup> Tahir Mahmoud, ‘Shaikh Umar’s Serious Condition in Prison’, Crescent International, 1-15 November 1997, Muslimedia, <http://www.muslimedia.com/archives/world98/shkomar.htm>

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

In early December 2001 Sheikh Omar's son Ahmed was captured in Afghanistan and interrogated by the US personnel as he was assumed to be a high-ranking member of Al-Qaeda.

Sheikh Omar's former attorney, Ms Stewart, continued to represent him after his conviction and detention, in order to 'improve the terms of the blind and diabetic Sheikh's confinement... [and]...to try to convince the U.S. to return him to his home country, Egypt.'<sup>25</sup> In 2000, the government allowed Ms Stewart to resume communication with the Sheikh, under restricted conditions detailed under the Special Administrative Measures (SAMs). All such contact was prohibited which was considered to be 'outside the scope of legal representation'.<sup>26</sup>

On 31 October 2001, the SAM regulations were secretly amended by Attorney General John Ashcroft to 'allow the Bureau of Prisons to conduct videotape and audiotape surveillance with respect to attorneys' communications with people in federal custody.'<sup>27</sup> Hence, under the amended regulations, the government was able to eavesdrop on Ms Stewart's conversation with Sheikh Omar.

The authorities alleged that in 2000, Ms Stewart released an article to Reuters containing a message by the Sheikh to his followers that he was 'withdrawing his support for a ceasefire' that existed in Egypt 'in a bid to win the sheik's release.'<sup>28</sup> Authorities also alleged that Ms Stewart was present when her assistants, who served as translators for the Sheikh and Ms Stewart, were composing the message on behalf of the Sheikh to his followers. Ms Stewart was subsequently found guilty in February 2005, 'on five counts of defrauding the government, conspiracy, and providing support for terrorism.'<sup>29</sup> According to many lawyers, the definition of terrorism was greatly stretched in this particular case. Ms Stewart was not known to have any links to terrorism whatsoever, nor did her actions result in any kind of terrorist act.

### **Current Situation of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman**

The Sheikh was detained in the federal Supermax prison in Colorado until September 2003, a prison which is known for housing USA's most dangerous and notorious criminals. He was shifted to the US Medical Center for Federal Prisoners (MCFP) in Springfield, Missouri<sup>30</sup> due to his serious health conditions. He is now 69 years of age and suffers from severe heart problems and diabetes. His diabetes has worsened to the extent that it has 'threatened the loss of his limbs.'<sup>31</sup>

In early December 2006<sup>32</sup>, he suffered a medical emergency and was given blood transfusion. During his medical examination at the centre it was also discovered that he has a tumour on his liver. According to physician reports, 'his overall prognosis is poor.'<sup>33</sup>

He is currently detained at Federal Medical Centre (FMC) in Butner, North Carolina.

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<sup>25</sup> Elaine Cassel, 'The Lynne Stewart Verdict', CounterPunch, 14 February 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/cassel02142005.html>

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Federal Bureau of Prisons. Inmate Locator,

<http://www.bop.gov/iloc2/InmateFinderServlet?Transaction=IDSearch&needingMoreList=false&IDType=IRN&IDNumber=34892-054>

<sup>31</sup> 'Worsening Health of Terror Cleric, Omar Abdel Rahman', KNX 10.70 Newsradio, 14 December 2006, Associated Press, <http://www.knx1070.com/pages/147919.php?contentType=4&contentId=258556>

<sup>32</sup> Judi McLeod, 'Blind Sheikh' Near Death; FBI Issues Terror Warning, 15 December 2006, Canada Free Press, 2007, <http://www.canadafreepress.com/2006/cover121506a.htm>

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

## Support for Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman

Many Muslim organizations in America as well as many human right organizations have refrained from campaigning for Sheikh Omar due to the highly political nature of his case and the persecution that has been faced by those who have been in the forefront of his campaign, such as his lawyers.

Hence right now, Sheikh Omar needs even more prayers and support, therefore IHRC requests you to do your best and to strive your utmost in campaigning for his release.

## Address for material to be sent to Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman

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Facility's Tel No: 919-575-3900  
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 Facility's Email: BUH/EXECASSISTANT@BOP.GOV

## Instructions for Sending Model Letter

Please send the model letter with the chosen insertions to the addresses below. Addresses for the recipients are given immediately after the model letter.

## Model Letter for Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman

Name  
 Address

Date

[Name of Recipient]  
 [Address of Recipient]

Dear [Name of Recipient]

I am writing to you regarding Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who was convicted in 1995 under five counts including seditious conspiracy against the US government and solicitation to murder Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. According to his attorney, former US attorney general Ramsey Clark, the entire trial was based on fear and prejudice and several violations during the trial were well documented, although never further investigated. With regards to Hosni Mubarak, the Sheikh openly criticized his regime for its extensive human rights violations and detention of political prisoners without trial. Many individuals have made the same comments but are not persecuted in the same manner Sheikh Omar has been.

I am also concerned that several questions which were raised during the trial remain unanswered; namely the bias nature of the judge chosen to preside over the trial, the fact the same judge disallowed

Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman's initial choice of attorneys to represent him and the same judge disallowed experts on Islam to testify on the meanings of several Islamic words. Doubts were also raised over FBI procedures used during the investigation of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman.

The Sheikh has been blind for most of his life, is diabetic and suffers from various ailments. He has been previously tortured in Egypt and is now suffering inhumane conditions in the US, where, ironically he sought asylum after being persecuted in Egypt. He has been subject to degrading treatment such as internal examinations and denied his religious rights. Further, now his health has deteriorated to the extent that chances of his death are imminent. I strongly urge you to see that all Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman's rights are restored and further violations do not take place against him.

INSERT APPROPRIATE PARAGRAPH

I look forward to hearing from you about the current conditions of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and measures taken to ensure his immediate and unconditional release.

Yours sincerely

[Name]

#### **Insertions**

Recipient Name: Ms Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner on Human Rights

#### **INSERTION**

I urge you to pressurise the American government to uphold the rights of detainees, in particular those of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman's. Please ensure the appropriate working groups in your office act upon this matter.

Recipient Name: Minister of Foreign Affairs in your Country (Addresses for a few foreign ministers are mentioned below. Please write only to Foreign Affairs Minister of your country.)

#### **INSERTION**

I urge you to make representations on behalf of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and pressurise the American government to treat him in accordance with international human rights standards.

## Addresses for Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman Model Letters

- Ms Louise Arbour  
UN High Commissioner on Human Rights  
Petitions Team  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
United Nations Office at Geneva  
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland  
  
Fax: + 41 22 917 9022 (particularly for urgent matters)  
Email: [tb-petitions@ohchr.org](mailto:tb-petitions@ohchr.org)

### Foreign Ministers

- UK:  
Mr. David Miliband MP  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH  
UK  
  
Fax: +44 20 7839 2417  
Email [private.office@fco.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@fco.gov.uk)
- Australia:  
Hon. Alexander Downer MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
  
Fax: +61 2 6273 4112  
[A.Downer.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:A.Downer.MP@aph.gov.au)
- South Africa:  
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Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Hon. Maxime Bernier PC MP  
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