

JUSTICE FOR WALTER RODNEY COMMITTEE

Press Release

April 22, 2014

Launch: Justice for Walter Rodney Committee

Many persons from around the world welcomed the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Walter Rodney on June 13, 1980. A number of concerned citizens from all parts of the world have come together to form the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee. Among the tasks of this newly established Committee is to work with others in all parts of the world to ensure that the processes of this inquiry are fair, transparent and does not dishonor the memory of Walter Rodney.

Since the formation of the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee, we have formally communicated with the Secretariat of the Commission with specific recommendations to enhance the process of a fair and transparent inquiry. As a consequence of our involvement and our knowledge of the work of Walter Rodney we informed the Secretariat of the Commission that we are willing and ready to assist the work of the commission in arriving at the truth. Many of the media are certainly aware that most if not all of us called, and have continued to clamor over the last 34 years for an impartial international commission of inquiry to investigate the circumstances, events, institutions, organizations, and individuals that played a role in the killing of Walter Rodney.

Among the list of growing supporters of the work of the committee are the Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court of Kenya, Dr. Willy Mutunga, who stated that it is great news that this commission has started. The present Chief Justice of Kenya was a student of Walter Rodney at the University of Dar es Salaam. Other support for the work of the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee has come from all five continents. Among the distinguished international supporters of the Justice for Walter Rodney Committee are Professor Micere Mugo, Patrick Bond of South Africa, Professor Issa Shivji as well as Larry Birns, Director of the Council of Hemispheric Affairs in Washington D.C.

Also appended to this release is the list of current signatories and supporters of Justice for Walter Rodney Committee. This list will continue to expand as more people from around the world request participation and support of the goals and objectives of the committee.

In its initial letter the committee made the following observations and recommendations.

Wazir Mohamed
Associate Professor
Indiana University East
For Justice for Walter Rodney Committee

The committee's initial letter to the commission, with its observations and recommendations, follows.

Letter Sent to Walter Rodney Commission
April 14, 2014

As individuals with some institutional knowledge of the events of the period under the purview of the terms of reference of the commission of inquiry we have an immense body of experience and knowledge which may prove useful to any investigation and investigative body. While we do not have to remind you of the length of time that has elapsed, since June 13, 1980, it is incumbent upon us that we engage your work constructively. In that regard, most of us were taken by surprise by the slim deadline for submission of statements which was originally advertised in the newspapers in Guyana.

Having noted the recent statement by the chair of the commission that there is no intention to stick in a hard and fast way to that deadline, we urge you to establish this change in new published advertisements. Further, we submit that given the fact that more Guyanese are now living outside of the country than at home, the commission will need to take that into account as it prepares to seek information, and to have open hearings. Moreover, the fact that most of the people with knowledge of the period and of some of the events, are either dead or now reside outside of Guyana, must give the commission pause, as it deliberates the logistics of conducting its business.

Finally, as the commission deliberates, we feel it is incumbent on you to consider the political environment of the 1970s which produced the activism of the people of Guyana

against the state. The nature and quality of the political state and state institutions governed by the ideology of party paramountcy, it should be recalled, produced attacks on democracy and violence against opponents and the wider populace.

Taking all of these matters into consideration we urge the commission to temper its approach to submission of statements. Care must be taken to ensure that everyone who should know about the commission is able to access the information. To this end, we urge the secretariat of the commission to advertise the TOR and call for submissions and statements in some if not all of the prominent Guyanese newspapers and other media in the diaspora.

We also urge the commission to establish a firm, but reasonable hearing timeline that gives those intending to appear adequate time to plan. In this regard hearings should be held in each county of Guyana, including in the mining town of Linden, and in the interior districts of the country. The commission must consider the difficulty of movement within Guyana, especially for people in the outlying districts. It should also consider the cost of internal transport, especially for low income Guyanese. Hearings should also be planned for the Caribbean, North America, the United Kingdom, Suriname, and Venezuela. Certainly the commission is aware that there are Guyanese enclaves (colonies) that have developed in all of these areas. The migration of Guyanese into these safe havens in the 1970s and 1980s has a direct connection to the reasons for Walter Rodney's activism in the period under your purview.

Having established that, we urge the secretariat of the commission to research the period carefully – the bulk of work of any commission of inquiry is carried out by capable staff with research capabilities. We hope that this commission is staffed with these capabilities. From this standpoint although it would be reasonable to assume that the commission may already know of these resources, we nevertheless venture to supply this information:

1. The commission should access and research the court documents, court transcripts of proceedings of the arson and treason trials (the treason accused were tried several times, and were re-arrested after they were freed at the Leonora Magistrates Court by Magistrate Anthony Singh) of the period. The commission also needs to apprise itself of the proceedings in the trial of Donald Rodney.
2. The commission needs to study the imposition of the National Security Act – which gave sweeping powers to the state and its policing agencies. The actions and activities of the police under this Act need to be researched by the commission. It must be remembered that apart from the murder by the police of

Ohene Koama, another WPA activist Edward Dublin was also killed, and countless people including WPA activists were tortured by the police in that period.

Further, the commission needs to be aware of reports at the time that the police would swoop into communities and shoot suspected criminals, who bled to death before being taken to the hospital.

3. The commission needs to obtain information from the police on the records and activities of the special branch and its nerve center which functioned from its headquarters at Ogle East Coast Demerara. It is recalled that the “recognition handbook” which identified major WPA activists was produced by this unit of the police, and circulated to every police station in the country for study by each member of the force.
4. The commission needs to access information on the secret underground cells at designated police locations designed specifically for political activists.
5. To ferret out some of this information in the absence of a free press during the period the files of the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) are important, especially the reports, statements, and other documents that detailed incidents of police brutality, breaking up of public demonstrations, and brutalization of individuals and their families.
6. For the same reason the commission should should access the reports of the Caribbean Contact – the newspaper published by the Caribbean Conference of Churches; the Catholic Standard – newspaper published by the Catholic Church in Guyana; The New Nation – newspaper published by the Peoples National Congress; the Mirror – newspaper published by the Peoples Progressive Party; the Dayclean – the Broadsheet published by the Working Peoples Alliance; and the news reports of Radio Antilles, CANA, and other Caribbean based news outlets.
7. The commission needs to examine records of Trade Unions – GAWU, GMWU, CCWU, UGSA, NAACIE – whose leaders and members were brutalized on orders from the state. Of particular note was the report that CCWU president Gordon Todd, who was arrested at a trade union protest outside Guyana Stores in 1979, was taken over the Demerara River in an army helicopter and held upside down over the river. There is no reason why the commission should not investigate the log of the GDF helicopters in that period.
8. The commission should take note of the nature and state of the public record – to this end it should meet with and summon the June 1980 staff of the Guyana Embassy in Washington which seemed to be a “hot bed” at the time in the chain of command.

These are among some of the actions the secretariat needs to take in its preparation for the inquiry. As we pointed out at the outset we are interested in the truth. To that end we ask you to invite impartial observers to observe and report on the process. Such observers may be found among the following institutions which been involved as observers before – and/or have made pronouncements on the situation in Guyana during that period under review:-

1. Lord Eric Avebury – British Parliamentary Human Rights Groups.
2. Amnesty International.
3. Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA).
4. The BBC.
5. The Associated Press.
6. The Caribbean Broadcasting Union.
7. Americas Watch.
8. Human Rights Watch.
9. Guyana Bar Association.
10. Caribbean Bar Association.

We end by reiterating our readiness to assist the work of the commission and inquiry.

List of Members: Justice for Walter Rodney Committee

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