

Florida Professor Sami Al-Arian: Deported, Free at Last

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South Florida University Professor Sami Al-Arian was one of thousands of US political prisoners. Outrageously treated.

Hounded for years for his faith, ethnicity, political activism and support for Palestinian rights. On February 20, 2003, he was arrested and imprisoned.

Falsely accused of backing organizations fronting for Palestinian Islamic Jihad. A 1997 wrongfully designated State Department Foreign Terrorist Organization at the behest of Israel.

Despite his academic excellence, numerous awards, impeccable credentials and tenured status, South Florida University president Judy Genshaft fired him. Succumbing to Israeli Lobby pressure.

His trial was a travesty of justice. Lasting six months. Costing about \$50 million. Involving dozens of prosecution witnesses.

Including Israeli intelligence agents and victims of Palestinian violence unrelated to his case.

Despite enormous resources and efforts to convict, Al-Arian was exonerated of eight terrorism charges. Jurors deadlocked largely in his favor on nine others.

All charges were fabricated. Prosecutors intended to retry him. Instead, plea bargain terms were struck.

Stipulating Al-Arian neither engaged in or had knowledge of any violent acts. Wouldn't have to cooperate further with prosecutors.

Would be released on time served. Then voluntarily deported to his country of choice.

In the meantime, he remained in custody pending sentencing and deportation. Expected an end to his ordeal. Pressure on the presiding judge changed things.

Al-Arian was wrongfully sentenced to 57 months imprisonment. Got credit for time served. Was held for another 11 months.

Then extended an additional 18 months. Finally freed. Remained under house arrest after enduring a horrendous ordeal in over a dozen federal prisons.

Including harsh solitary confinement. Multiple hunger strikes for justice. One lasting 60 days endangering his life.

The late Howard Zinn called his treatment “an outrageous violation of human rights, both from a constitutional point of view and as a simple test of justice.”

His appeals attorney, former National Lawyers Guild President Peter Erlinder, said his prosecution “was a blatant attempt to silence political speech and dissent in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy.”

“The nature of the political persecution of this case has been demonstrated throughout all its aspects, not only during the trial and the never-ending right-wing media onslaught, but also after the stunning defeat of the government in 2005, and its ill-advised abuse of the grand jury system thereafter.”

Months after full exoneration on all charges, Al-Arian was deported to Turkey on February 5. His 12-year-long ordeal finally ended.

Jonathan Turley was his most recent lead criminal defense attorney until all charges against him were dropped.

He said his case “raised troubling due process, academic freedom and free speech issues.” His career ruined for supporting what he believed right. He committed no crimes.

Turley said he left behind five children and grandchildren. Throughout his ordeal, his family was “a rock of support.”

He endured “incredibly trying years. Turley met with him before his deportation. It’s unclear if he’ll resume teaching in Turkey, he said.

He’ll likely continue writing and lecturing. “Despite being subjected to extremely cruel treatment and conditions, he is not bitter and remains committed to the principles of freedom that first drew him to the United States,” said Turley.

“Indeed, his family is an American success story with five children who have secured advanced degrees from leading universities and will remain in the United States in teaching, journalism and other fields.”

His case remains “a chilling chapter in” US history. A “shocking abuse” of power.

“(A) flagrant violation of (plea bargain terms) reached with the Justice Department.”

Classic police state injustice. Al-Arian outrageously mistreated for 12 nightmarish years.

Before leaving for Turkey, he issued the following statement. Dated February 4, 2015, saying:

“To my dear friends and supporters,”

“After 40 years, my time in the US has come to an end. Like many immigrants of my generation, I came to the US in 1975 to seek a higher education and greater opportunities.”

“But I also wanted to live in a free society where freedom of speech, association and religion are not only tolerated but guaranteed and protected under the law.”

"That's why I decided to stay and raise my family here, after earning my doctorate in 1986. Simply put, to me, freedom of speech and thought represented the cornerstone of a dignified life."

"Today, freedom of expression has become a defining feature in the struggle to realize our humanity and liberty."

"The forces of intolerance, hegemony, and exclusionary politics tend to favor the stifling of free speech and the suppression of dissent."

"But nothing is more dangerous than when such suppression is perpetrated and sanctioned by government."

"As one early American once observed, 'When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty.' "

"Because government has enormous power and authority over its people, such control must be checked, and people, especially those advocating unpopular opinions, must have absolute protections from governmental overreach and abuse of power."

"A case in point of course is the issue of Palestinian self-determination."

"In the United States, as well as in many other western countries, those who support the Palestinian struggle for justice, and criticize Israel's occupation and brutal policies, have often experienced an assault on their freedom of speech in academia, media, politics and society at large."

"After the tragic events of September 11th, such actions by the government intensified, in the name of security. Far too many people have been targeted and punished because of their unpopular opinions or beliefs."

"During their opening statement in my trial in June 2005, my lawyers showed the jury two poster-sized photographs of items that government agents took during searches of my home many years earlier."

"In one photo, there were several stacks of books taken from my home library. The other photo showed a small gun I owned at the time."

"The attorney looked the jury in the eyes and said: 'This is what this case is about. When the government raided my client's house, this is what they seized,' he said, pointing to the books, 'and this is what they left,' he added, pointing to the gun in the other picture."

" 'This case is not about terrorism but about my client's right to freedom of speech,' he continued."

"Indeed, much of the evidence the government presented to the jury during the six-month trial were speeches I delivered, lectures I presented, articles I wrote, magazines I edited, books I owned, conferences I convened, rallies I attended, interviews I gave, news I heard, and websites I never even accessed."

"But the most disturbing part of the trial was not that the government offered my speeches, opinions, books, writings, and dreams into evidence, but that an intimidated judicial system allowed them to be admitted into evidence."

"That's why we applauded the jury's verdict. Our jurors represented the best society had to offer."

"Despite all of the fear-mongering and scare tactics used by the authorities, the jury acted as free people, people of conscience, able to see through Big Brother's tactics."

"One hard lesson that must be learned from the trial is that political cases should have no place in a free and democratic society."

"But despite the long and arduous ordeal and hardships suffered by my family, I leave with no bitterness or resentment in my heart whatsoever."

"In fact, I'm very grateful for the opportunities and experiences afforded to me and my family in this country, and for the friendships we've cultivated over the decades. These are lifelong connections that could never be affected by distance."

"I would like to thank God for all the blessings in my life. My faith sustained me during my many months in solitary confinement and gave me comfort that justice would ultimately prevail."

"Our deep thanks go to the friends and supporters across the US, from university professors to grassroots activists, individuals and organizations, who have stood alongside us in the struggle for justice."

"My trial attorneys, Linda Moreno and the late Bill Moffitt, were the best advocates anyone could ask for, both inside and outside of the courtroom. Their spirit, intelligence, passion and principle were inspirational to so many."

"I am also grateful to Jonathan Turley and his legal team, whose tireless efforts saw the case to its conclusion. Jonathan's commitment to justice and brilliant legal representation resulted in the government finally dropping the case."

"Our gratitude also goes to my immigration lawyers, Ira Kurzban and John Pratt, for the tremendous work they did in smoothing the way for this next phase of our lives."

"Thanks also to my children for their patience, perseverance and support during the challenges of the last decade. I am so proud of them."

Finally, my wife Nahla has been a pillar of love, strength and resilience. She kept our family together during the most difficult times."

"There are no words to convey the extent of my gratitude. We look forward to the journey ahead and take with us the countless happy memories we formed during our life in the United States."

Al-Arian's mistreatment is one of many examples of post-9/11 US police state injustice.

Thousands like him remain incarcerated for being Muslims in the wrong countries at the wrong time. Victims of America's vicious worldwide war OF terror.

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