

“Justice Delayed is Justice Denied”

On night of 11 January 1999, Roger Sylvester, a 30-year-old black man, was restrained on his doorstep by eight police officers from Tottenham Police Station. He sustained numerous injuries, fell into a coma and was put on a life support machine. Seven days later, Roger was pronounced dead.

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Roger on his death bed. How did this happen?

Delayed Justice

In May 2001, Lord Chief Justice Woolf refused to grant Roger's family disclosure to challenge the Crown Prosecution Services decision not to prosecute any of the eight Police officers. He urged the MET to be generous with disclosure of information from the investigation and suggested that an inquest date be set soon.

To date, one and a half years on no inquest has taken place. The delay of the inquest into Roger's death is unprecedented. It is the longest for a death in custody, surpassed only by custody deaths in Northern Ireland. The Lord Chancellor's department, the

Home Secretary and HM Coroner have failed to organise an inquest within a reasonable time. Under Article 2 of the European Court of Human Rights the state has a duty to carry out an effective, prompt and public investigation into a custody death.

Effect of the prolonged delay

The Sylvester family cannot get on with their lives. The emotional effect of not knowing what was done to Roger almost four years ago coupled with the upheaval in their day to day lives caused by decisions beyond their control has meant their lives are being kept on hold. They knew from the outset that delay was inherent in the process but did not think the delay would be unprecedented.

Inquest

The inquest will not answer questions such as why Roger died or who killed him. These are crucial questions from the family. They are concerned that the officers, as in previous inquests do not answer questions that may incriminate them. The family is also concerned with attempts to limit voluntary disclosure to them. Disclosure should be a positive duty of the state and must be compulsory.

The inquest is a procedure that is imposed on families. The

Sylvester's did not choose it. It is the first and possibly the only time the investigation findings could be challenged but families have no control and are rarely funded.

Death in custody process

The family believe the process is archaic, inadequate and dishonest, it was not designed to prosecute rogue police officers. There should be no tinkering with this process, openness, accountability and transparency could only be restored by a new process.

Diary Of Events for 2002

January

Deputy Coroner at St Pancras Coroners Court, Dr Susan Hungerford holds a pre Inquest hearing in the absence of the coroner Dr Chan. Attempts were made to limit disclosure, the family was told that some documents would be for inspection only and witnesses will be asked for their consent to use their statements at the inquest.

RSJC attends a meeting organised by the Metropolitan Police Authority to discuss deaths in custody issues.

February

St Pancras Coroner, Dr Chan



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unexpectedly returns to work and sends his Deputy Coroner on 3 months leave.

In response to the Sylvester's request for public funds, the Lord Chancellor wrote the family informing them that there will be no legal aid funding for the inquest.

Mrs Sylvester speaks at the National Assembly Against Racism Conference about the loss of her Son.

RSJC joined the delegation of United Family and Friends Campaign, to meet Lord Goldsmith the Attorney General, to discuss his review of the role of the Crown Prosecution service (CPS) in death in custody cases.

March

The Sylvester family receives limited disclosure from the 18 volumes of information collected by Essex Police.

The Sylvester family challenges the Lord Chancellors refusal of legal aid to the family.

April

Inquest date set by Dr Chan for the 14th October at Hampstead Magistrates Court (this court is at the back of Hampstead police station).

Police officer involved in the death of Roger mounted a fresh attempt to sue the BBC. Proceedings to continue after the inquest

RSJC attend a Safer Restraint conference organised by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA)

May

Dr Chan hands in his resignation and works his notice.

Meeting at the House of Commons with David Lammy and Jeremy

Corbyn MP's and INQUEST to discuss the issue of funding legal representation at the inquest.

INQUEST prepares a briefing paper arguing that funding should be granted so that the family are on an equal footing with all other parties whose legal representation is paid for from public or Police Federation funds.

David Lammy, Jeremy Corbyn, and Lord Toby Harris of the MPA meets with Baroness Scotland to state the family case regarding funding.

Three police officers from the MET's internal Complaints Investigation Bureau to face disciplinary charges on 7 offences relating to the investigation into Roger's death.

June

Lord Chancellor decides to authorise limited funding for Roger's inquest.

Dr Chan conducts the inquest into Harry Stanley's death, he does not allow unlawful killing as a possible verdict to the jury.

On the day of the England vs Brazil world cup match, jurors return an open verdict in the Harry Stanley case rejecting the police's version of events. On the same day the judge stops the trial of police officers involved in the death of Christopher Alder.

July

Dr Chan unexpectedly revokes Dr Hungerford's appointment.

RSJC addresses the Mile End New Testament Church of God about the Christian aspect of Roger's death

August

Dr Chan resigns from his office at St Pancras Coroners Court.

Roger's union, Unison, offers financial assistance for the inquest.

October inquest date into Roger's death is cancelled.

September

RSJC addresses the Ministry of Praise Church (Tottenham) about the Christian aspect of Roger's death.

Injustice film receives best documentary award at the Black Film Makers International Festival.

The Sylvester family is informed that a new Coroner has been appointed at St Pancras Coroners Court.

October

The United reform Church shows the Injustice film.

Annual demonstration to Downing Street by the United Friends and Family Campaign.

November

INQUEST update the report on Roger's death , available from INQUEST.

RSJC attend meeting with the Coroners Review Team, organised by INQUEST for bereaved families whose loved ones have died in custody to discuss their concerns.

December

Black Londoner's Forum Screens Injustice film.

Family meet with Hilary Benn MP, in charge of Prison's and Coroner's to discuss their concerns with delay in holding an Inquest.

Roger's family do not qualify for legal aid. The RSJC will therefore have to continue to raise funds to meet all legal costs. All donations will therefore be gratefully received.

I would like further details about the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign:

Name/Organisation _____

Address _____ Post Code _____

Email Address _____

I wish to donate £..... To the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign. All cheques should be made payable to: **Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign.**

Account No: **31238892** Sort Code: **40 03 33** Bank Name: **HSBC**