

# ‘In the Spirit of Mandela’: International Tribunal Seeks to Charge U.S. Government with Crimes Against Humanity

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*In this era of police violence, pandemic worries, and economic crisis, it is no surprise that U.S. (and local) government agencies have a poor track record of sharing information honestly and directly—especially information about their own complicity in actions and policies that are undemocratic, militaristic, racist, sexist or otherwise oppressive.*

Basic truths about the society we live in are actively suppressed and denied—including truths about the imprisonment of those whose political views and actions challenge the powers that be.

Though the growth of the prison industry has been well documented, there is virtually no documentation and even less news about the imprisonment of many who would be considered political prisoners by any international human rights standards. This is due to a joint coverup effort by both the government and corporate media.

## **But that coverup may no longer be sustainable**

An historic [International Tribunal on U.S. Human Rights Abuses Against Black, Brown and Indigenous Peoples](#) will take place in New York City on October 22-25, 2021. It is designed to propel this and related issues into the forefront of public consciousness.



## In the spirit of Mandela

International Tribunal on US Human Rights Violations

An International Tribunal indicting the United States government with genocide and high human rights violations against Black and Indigenous people, followed by clear remedial, redemptive, and reparative action steps.

Oct. 22-25, 2021

Virtual/New York

[spiritofmandela.org](http://spiritofmandela.org)

### See More Details on the Event At The End Of This Article

The Tribunal coalesces an unprecedented alliance of attorneys, academics, and organizers ranging from Black Lives Matter activists, former Black Panthers, civil rights advocates and the Puerto Rican decolonization movement, to immigrant rights survivors of the detention centers, and Indigenous peoples fighting for their sovereignty against land theft, fracking, and neglect.

This coalition could not have come together—nor can it remain united and organize for effective future change—without fully understanding the historic context for this work. December 2021 will be the 70th anniversary of a similar campaign for human rights launched a few years after the United Nations was formed. At that time prominent African American leaders and their allies brought a petition to the U.N. that boldly stated: “We Charge Genocide!”<sup>[1]</sup> The 2021 Tribunal will reassert this charge and relate it to more recent efforts oriented towards 21st Century conclusions.

A 1991 article by one of us (Bob Lederer) [see below] reported on the previous year’s **International Tribunal on the Human Rights Violations of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States**,<sup>[2]</sup> as well as earlier efforts to internationalize these issues.

Citing past successes from grassroots worldwide organizing, it noted “[A]ctivists believe that even those facing life sentences may yet see the light of day.” Indeed, over the past three decades, that has come to pass for perhaps half of the then-100+ U.S. political prisoners. While some were released on parole with strong legal work and minimal mobilizations, most only got out after sustained grassroots pressure campaigns, often carried out for many years and including strong international components.

Among the many successes:

- In 1997, after 27 years behind bars and a massive international campaign, Black Panther veteran **Geronimo Ji-Jaga Pratt** was released from prison. After years

of effort, Pratt had uncovered indisputable evidence that FBI wiretaps showed he was 400 miles away from the crime for which he was convicted.<sup>[3]</sup> With official recognition that prosecutors had concealed evidence and that Pratt was a survivor of the U.S.'s illegal Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), he was able to win a federal civil rights lawsuit demonstrating that he was framed and \$4.5 million in damages.<sup>[4]</sup>

- In 1999, following a coordinated, years-long effort which included a global petition signed by a dozen Nobel Peace Prize laureates and calls for release from across the fiercely divided Puerto Rican political spectrum, **14 militant activists for the independence of Puerto Rico** (a U.S. colony since 1898) were granted clemency by President Bill Clinton. Many had been incarcerated for as long as 19 years. Convicted in many cases of the thought crime of “seditious conspiracy,” they were met by large cheering crowds that greeted them as heroes.<sup>[5]</sup>
- In 2007, another repressive and vindictive U.S. government attempt saw six elder former Black Panthers arrested and charged in San Francisco with conspiracy for crimes that took place decades earlier. (In 1975 a federal court had dismissed related charges against two of them based on a court ruling that they had been illegally tortured by local police.)<sup>[6]</sup> This was an obvious attempt to spread fear among a new generation of resisters inspired by the Panthers. A year later, substantial educational efforts from coast to coast not only exonerated the six and dropped all charges against them, but also spotlighted the two additional Panthers indicted in the same case (collectively known as “**the San Francisco 8**”<sup>[7]</sup>) who were already serving long prison sentences, and whose efforts for parole were both ultimately successful in the years that followed.

FORMER BLACK PANTHERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CHARGED IN 36 YEAR OLD CASE


MURDER CHARGES FROM CONFESSIONS EXTRACTED BY TORTURE

# FREE THE SF8

STOP THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPT TO CRUSH THE LEGACY OF THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

HERMAN BELL FRANCISCO TORRES HENRY (HANK) JONES RAY POINTER  
RICHARD NEAL HAROLD TAYLOR JALIL MUHAMMAD RICHARD BROWN

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Source: [Graypantherssf.igc.org](http://Graypantherssf.igc.org)

- The case of **Mumia Abu-Jamal**, once described by *The New York Times* as the world's "best known death row inmate," has caused protests, letter-writing, and massive campaigns in every corner of the planet over the past three decades. An award-winning journalist and still-active author and radio commentator whose 1982 trial has been found by numerous human rights organizations to have been plagued by massive police and judicial bias and perjured testimony, Abu-Jamal's death sentence was overturned in 2001 by the Federal District Court of Pennsylvania.<sup>[8]</sup> Though still fighting for full release, Mumia's release from death row was widely celebrated, and the broad international campaign to free him has intensified as he has faced life-threatening illnesses (see below).
- **Russell Maroon Shoatz**, a former Black Panther and Pennsylvania Black Liberation organizer pursued by the FBI's COINTELPRO and unjustly sentenced in 1970 to life in prison, has been described by supporters as "implacable," the word used in the title of an anthology of his writings. He has been known not

only for his political militancy, but also as a mentor to his incarcerated colleagues wherever he landed in prison. With two successful escapes, Shoatz was placed in solitary confinement in 1992 and held there for a torturous 22 consecutive years! With United Nations experts designating as torture any solitary confinement lasting more than 14 consecutive days, Shoatz's case attracted international attention for its obviously punitive intent and heinous content.<sup>[9]</sup> Returned to general population in 2014, Shoatz still suffers the effects of those decades and fights for release from prison under still-draconian conditions (see below).

- Released on parole after more than 33 years as a political prisoner/prisoner of war (and initial police torture, including with a burning cigar, that left him with serious long-term damage), the success of the case of **Sekou Odinga**, a founder of the International Chapter of the Black Panther Party, was a product of grassroots, long-term organizing, legal agitation, and legislative reform of parole. With growing consciousness about and admiration of the Panthers from hip-hop artists and cultural workers in the community, and pressure on lawmakers and politicians to release aging prisoners whose rate of recidivism and return to crime after decades behind bars is extremely low, Odinga returned to the community in 2014 and today sits on the International Tribunal's Coordinating Committee.<sup>[10]</sup> Other New York State prisoners, including former Panthers **Robert Seth Hayes** (who died in 2019)<sup>[11]</sup> and **Jalil Muntaqim**,<sup>[12]</sup> won similar parole releases after years of struggle to shift incarceration policies in New York State and elsewhere.
- Puerto Rican political prisoner **Oscar López Rivera** was held for 36 years of his original 55-year sentence for "seditious conspiracy," including long stints in maximum-security conditions described by human rights lawyers as tantamount to torture. During President Obama's second term, as the global campaign for his release reached a fevered pitch, the heads of state of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba declared López Rivera to be "the Mandela of the Americas."

With life-size cardboard cutouts of Oscar seen in small towns, mountain communities, and every major city throughout the island archipelago, an unprecedented array of pro-statehood advocates, status quo "commonwealth" supporters, and *independentistas* joined forces to demand his unconditional release. After the annual United Nations Decolonization Committee hearing on Puerto Rico in 2016, the Committee—in addition to joining the global outcry to "bring Oscar home"—vowed to form an official U.N. delegation to visit him in prison if he were not released in the coming year. In 2017, just days before leaving office, Obama announced the plans for López Rivera's freedom; he returned to his country a celebrated national hero.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Despite the constitutionally questionable "felony murder doctrine" and a scandalous exit from office, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo commuted the life sentence of white anti-imperialist **David Gilbert** during his last twelve hours in office this year. Gilbert's history as a peaceful anti-war activist, his work in prison as a mentor of young men and co-developer of a trail-blazing AIDS peer counseling program, and his consistent statements of remorse about the deaths which resulted from a 1981 action for which he was an unarmed driver earned

him the support of the heads of the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, Friends (Quakers), and Unitarian Universalists, as well as the daughter of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., granddaughter of Mohandas Gandhi, and children of some of those killed in the original crime.<sup>[14]</sup> Gilbert, who was previously serving 75 years to life, will have a parole hearing this month (October 2021).

Nonetheless, three dozen U.S. political prisoners still remain incarcerated, the majority of them in their senior years and ailing, in some cases with terminal illnesses. Prison medical care is substandard at best for all incarcerated people, but political prisoners have also faced the wrath of a vengeful police apparatus. All are now the focus of urgent pressure campaigns by their supporters demanding (depending on the case) immediate parole, clemency, or court-ordered release.<sup>[15]</sup> Some examples include:

- **Russell Maroon Shoatz**, incredibly called “a risk to escape and a threat to society” at a 2021 parole hearing despite being diagnosed with terminal stage-4 pancreatic cancer and having barely survived COVID-19, being partially blind, dependent on a urinary catheter bag, and wholly confined to a wheelchair! Shoatz’s supporters, including Nobel Peace Prize laureates, consider him a prime candidate for immediate compassionate release.<sup>[16]</sup>
- **Dr. Mutulu Shakur**, New Afrikan (Black) liberation activist heavily targeted by COINTELPRO and a leader of Chinese medicine clinics under Black and Latinx community control in New York City, had been scheduled for mandatory release from a 60-year sentence in 2016, but was held back for punitive and vengeful reasons. Today at age 71, he struggles with bone-marrow cancer and is in constant pain. Various legal channels seeking his compassionate release have so far proved fruitless.<sup>[17]</sup>
- **Sundiata Acoli** was a noted mathematician employed by the NASA space program who became a famed member of New York’s “Panther 21” manufactured conspiracy case (in which a jury acquitted everyone) and later co-defendant of Assata Shakur, arrested in 1973 and unjustly convicted along with her to life in prison (see below). At age 84, after 49 years in prison, Acoli has been eligible for and denied parole for almost three decades.<sup>[18]</sup> He recently survived COVID-19 but has numerous other ailments, some life-threatening. An urgent campaign for his release continues with widespread community admiration and the support of even some law enforcement groups.<sup>[19]</sup>
- **Leonard Peltier**, an American Indian Movement elder (now 77) who has been in prison since 1977, has enjoyed widespread support from members of Congress, international Parliaments, Nobel Prize laureates, and countless human rights experts.<sup>[20]</sup> Despite the fact that all his co-defendants are free, Peltier’s deteriorating health and the prosecutorial misconduct of his original case make him one of the most famous U.S. political prisoners still behind bars.<sup>[21]</sup>
- **Mumia Abu-Jamal**, though well known and widely supported, has had—after nearly 40 years of incarceration, including lengthy solitary confinement—a multitude of life-threatening health crises in recent years for which he suffered blatant medical neglect and maltreatment. These include a dangerous and

painful cirrhosis of the liver, congestive heart failure, hepatitis C, diabetes, and recently diagnosed COVID-19. When Abu-Jamal was faced with emergency heart surgery in early 2021 (and the threat to remain shackled during the procedure), a group of ten U.N. experts from the Human Rights Council declared, “This ongoing and continuing cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, including deliberate disregard of his dignity and inhumane conditions of confinement, is a clear violation of Mr. Abu-Jamal’s most fundamental rights.”<sup>[22]</sup> Meanwhile, Abu-Jamal’s supporters proclaimed: The only appropriate treatment for these ailments is FREEDOM!<sup>[23]</sup>

These campaigns are especially urgent in the wake of the deaths in prison or shortly after release of 21 U.S. political prisoners over the past 35 years.<sup>[24]</sup> In many cases, family members and doctors are convinced that, had the prisoners been freed as they got sicker, they might have had a chance to survive longer by escaping high stress prison conditions and having access to better quality medical care.

Meanwhile, several former political prisoners and activists targeted by the state but not arrested have been living in exile for many years. The most renowned, former Black Panther **Assata Shakur**, was arrested and shot in the back by police in 1973. She then overcame seven separate COINTELPRO-orchestrated charges but was ultimately railroaded to a life sentence on the eighth (along with Sundiata Acoli, see above)—in a trial her lawyer called “a legal lynching and a kangaroo court.” (See Rosemary Mealy, ed., “Assata Shakur: The Life of a Revolutionary,” [CovertAction Quarterly, Fall 1998 \(No. 65\)](#), pp. 34-44.)<sup>[25]</sup>

After surviving an oppressive all-men’s prison in New Jersey, Shakur escaped in 1979 with the help of clandestine Black and white radical comrades.<sup>[26]</sup> She was later granted political asylum by Cuba, where she has been active in community life. Successive U.S. and New Jersey governments have boosted the bounty for her forced return to \$2 million, requiring her to be especially cautious to prevent kidnapping by the CIA or a vigilante.<sup>[27]</sup>

Meanwhile the past three decades have seen a whole new generation of political prisoners incarcerated, mostly from the newer movements that have blossomed, though some 1960s activists have also been framed years later by an FBI determined to punish their longtime adversaries. Some examples:

- **Longtime Black Liberation leaders:** Two leading Black Liberation activists and religious leaders, **Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin** and **Rev. Joy Powell**, were framed for crimes they didn’t commit and given long sentences in 2000 and 2006, respectively. Imam Al-Amin (aka **H. Rap Brown**) was a famed civil rights and Black Panther leader in the 1960s. He was harassed and arrested at FBI direction, later became a religious leader, and was convicted of a murder in Atlanta, Georgia, without clear evidence, for which another man confessed. Now 78, he is serving a life sentence and has been denied needed medical care in prison.<sup>[28]</sup> Rev. Powell worked against police brutality and corruption for years in Rochester, New York, and is now serving two sentences totaling 25-years-to-life in trials rife with prosecutorial misconduct.<sup>[29]</sup>

- **Black Lives Matter:** Since racist police and vigilante murders sparked this movement and related justice struggles in 2014, numerous street protesters and organizational leaders, almost all Black, have served prison time for felony charges. Possibly the longest sentence (10 years) is being served by a white solidarity activist, **Eric King**, who has been isolated and assaulted in prison.<sup>[30]</sup> More than 350 are now facing federal felony charges, and many more have received state charges, flowing from the nationwide street uprisings against genocidal police terror provoked by the May 2020 videoed lynching of George Floyd in Minneapolis.<sup>[31]</sup> The National Lawyers Guild and a grassroots coalition in six cities are leading campaigns, backed by more than 90 organizations, to have those charges dropped.<sup>[32]</sup>
- **Indigenous-led environmental/sovereignty defense:** Four water and environmental protectors from the movement to stop the highly polluting Dakota Access (oil) pipeline on Lakota land in Standing Rock, North Dakota, in 2016-17 have served prison time of several months each.<sup>[33]</sup> **Red Fawn Fallis**, an Oglala Lakota Sioux citizen and supporter of the American Indian Movement, received the harshest sentence—nearly five years for charges related to a gun given to her by her then-boyfriend, an undercover FBI informant.<sup>[34]</sup>

Also, **Jessica Reznicek**, a North American Catholic Worker ally, is serving eight years for related civil disobedience actions against the same pipeline in Iowa.<sup>[35]</sup> Since 2020, a similar, Indigenous-led movement against Line 3 (another oil pipeline encroaching on Native land) in Minnesota has led so far to several people being charged with felonies. Those cases are pending.<sup>[36]</sup>

- **Arab and Muslims accused of “terrorism”:** Hundreds of Arab and Muslim immigrants and U.S. citizens have been swept up in the post-September-11<sup>th</sup>, years-long manipulated fury against the Arabs and Muslims living in the United States. Several were convicted on “terrorism” charges, often manufactured or based on entrapment.<sup>[37]</sup> Most notorious is the case of **Dr. Afia Siddiqui**, a Pakistani, U.S.-educated neuroscientist who was rendered from her homeland to the U.S. by the CIA in 2008 and sentenced to life in prison, where she was seriously injured in an assault this year.<sup>[38]</sup>
- **“Green Scare” activists:** As new movements have targeted corporate destruction of the natural environment and clear-cutting logging operations, factory farms, fur manufacturers, agribusiness-related labs researching eco-harmful GMOs (genetically modified organisms), and animal-abusing medical testers, the U.S. government has charged dozens with felonies, often using new laws criminalizing eco/animal protests and heightening penalties.<sup>[39]</sup> Since the early 1990s, more than 50 activists have done lengthy prison time on such charges. Three remain imprisoned today. One of those, a transgender man named **Marius Mason** serving 22 years in federal prison since 2009, was first held in a restrictive control unit based on his politics and then struggled for many years before he obtained a medical diagnosis that finally allowed him to seek



hormone therapy and transfer to a male prison.<sup>[40]</sup>

- **Plowshares protesters:** More than 200 activists from the largely religious “Plowshares” movement, led by the Catholic Workers, have been imprisoned since 1980 – two were sentenced to 18 years – for 100+ civil disobedience actions symbolically damaging and pouring blood on nuclear weapons, war jets, and military bases to demand nuclear disarmament and an end to U.S. militarism.<sup>[41]</sup>
- **Military resisters and whistleblowers:** Many U.S. military personnel have served prison time since 1991 for resisting or disclosing war crimes (whistleblowers) in the Gulf War (1991), Afghan invasion/occupation (2001-2021), Iraq invasion/occupation (2003-date), and other illegal U.S. attacks against nations in the Global South.<sup>[42]</sup>

Most notably, army soldier **Chelsea Manning** spent seven years in military prisons, during which a U.N. Rapporteur found her to have been tortured. After many grassroots campaigns, protests and honors in LGBT Pride marches, President Obama granted clemency in 2017.<sup>[43]</sup> Later that year, under Trump, she was reincarcerated for 12 months for refusing to collaborate with a grand jury investigation.<sup>[44]</sup> During her initial incarceration, she came out as trans and had to sue to obtain gender-affirming care.<sup>[45]</sup>

In a related case, WikiLeaks publisher and Australian citizen **Julian Assange** is now facing extradition to the U.S. from the U.K. and possible life in prison for publishing data on war crimes, repression and corruption released by whistleblowers. (See [CovertAction Magazine, Sept. 7, 2020](#).) A British judge has denied extradition on grounds that U.S. prisons could not adequately protect him from the risk of suicide (following his years of U.S. and British persecution).<sup>[46]</sup> *Yahoo News* reported in September 2021 that, in 2017, the CIA discussed possible plans to kidnap or assassinate the journalist in London.<sup>[47]</sup>



Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, political prisoner. [Source: [rashidmod.com](http://rashidmod.com)]

Pursuing freedom or at least less life-threatening conditions for all of these prisoners, the various support organizations have used a variety of techniques (in addition to the people’s tribunals described below): petitions, mass email campaigns, demonstrations at courts and prisons, packing court proceedings, civil disobedience actions, lobbying, and more.

Importantly, efforts have continued to bring some of these cases, and the larger movements against genocide and eco-cide from which they developed, to international bodies. In 2001, the National Black United Front, December 12th Movement, and others brought charges of genocide against Black people to the U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa.<sup>[48]</sup> For years, the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva has heard consistent testimony from the U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN) and others, who have filed documents at the Universal Periodic Review sessions conducted for all nation-states.<sup>[49]</sup> The USHRN has utilized other U.N. mechanisms to bring U.S. human rights abuses before United Nations-affiliated bodies.

In addition, between 1992 and 2001, a variety of coalitions led by Black, Brown and Indigenous freedom organizations built on the successes of previous efforts to convene international tribunals on U.S. human rights violations and genocide:

- 1992 - The **International Tribunal of Indigenous Peoples and Oppressed Nations** was held in San Francisco. The Tribunal challenged the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “discovery of America” by Christopher Columbus and discussed the massive, systematic violations of human rights and international law against

people of color. It included perspectives from Black people, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Mexicans/Chicanos, and white anti-imperialists.<sup>[50]</sup>

- 1993 - **The Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kanaka Maoli Tribunal** marked the centennial of the U.S. overthrow of Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani and visited each island illegally seized and annexed by the U.S. It centered the Indigenous Kanaka Maoli claim for sovereignty on an international stage.<sup>[51]</sup>
- 1998 - Based on a call by Black Liberation political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim (who also called for a "Spirit of Mandela" coalition in 2018),<sup>[52]</sup> a successful **Jericho March to the White House**, attended by over 5,000 and organized by the newly formed and now ongoing National Jericho Movement, demanded recognition and amnesty for all U.S. political prisoners across lines of race and nationality.<sup>[53]</sup>
- 2001 - The **International Commission on Inquiry** in San Juan, Puerto Rico, found repeated U.S. government violations of human rights in suppressing protests and civil disobedience actions against the U.S. Navy's 60-year occupation and frequent life-threatening and environment-destroying bombing practice on the island of Vieques.<sup>[54]</sup> The strong verdict was one of many sparks that forced the Navy's withdrawal and return of the island to full Puerto Rican sovereignty in 2003.

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**Matt Meyer** is an internationally noted author, historian, and organizer, re-elected in 2021 as Secretary-General of the International Peace Research Association. Meyer is the Senior Research Scholar of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst's Resistance Studies Initiative, working primarily in solidarity with the still-occupied peoples of Puerto Rico, Palestine, West Papua, Western Sahara, Kashmir, and Ambazonia in Central Africa. Matt is the editor of the book [Let Freedom Ring: A Collection of Documents from the Movements to Free U.S. Political Prisoners](#). His local work with Resistance in Brooklyn, the Northeast Political Prisoner Coalition, and the Spirit of Mandela Coalition focuses on freeing all political prisoners. Matt can be reached at: [MMMSRN1@gmail.com](mailto:MMMSRN1@gmail.com).

## Notes

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Featured image: Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, political prisoner. [Source: [rashidmod.com](http://rashidmod.com)]

## Appendix

### The 2021 International Tribunal: In the Spirit of Nelson Mandela

Oct. 22-25, 2021

Livestreaming at [tribunal2021.com](http://tribunal2021.com) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/tribunal2021) and online via Zoom

[Register here.](#)

[Schedule of Events](#)

The 2021 International Tribunal itself derives from a historic legacy and trajectory, initiated by a U.S.-based coalition, *In the Spirit of Mandela*. Created in 2018, the coalition recognizes and affirms the rich history of diverse global activists, including Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela, Graca Machel Mandela, Ella Baker, Dennis Banks, Cesar Chavez, Fannie Lou Hamer, Fred Korematsu, Lolita Lebron, Rosa Parks, Ingrid Washinawatok, and many more in the resistance traditions of Black, Brown and Indigenous Peoples. Though separate and independent from the *In the Spirit of Mandela* coalition that called for the Tribunal, the Panel of Jurists (see below) recognizes the important historical precedents that have shaped the charges against U.S. government agencies.

The year 2021 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the campaign in which African American human rights

leaders Paul Robeson and William Patterson, with the support of eminent sociologist Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, presented the “We Charge Genocide” petition to the burgeoning United Nations headquarters in 1951.<sup>[55]</sup> Then in 1964, Minister Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik el-Shabazz) formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity, in part to bring the case of U.S. human rights abuses to the attention of the U.N.<sup>[56]</sup> The 2021 Tribunal verdict itself will be delivered in front of U.N. headquarters, but hearings and community testimony will take place at the site of Malcolm X’s assassination, the now-refurbished and Columbia University-affiliated Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center in Harlem.

The Panel of Jurists is composed of nine members, with representatives including a former South African Member of Parliament; a board member of the distinguished Nobel Peace Laureate organization with a dozen Nobel Peace officer awardees; a Puerto Rican legal scholar who serves as an expert for the U.N. Committee on Decolonization; a U.N. representative of the oldest inter-faith pacifist organization in the world; an internationally accredited expert on genocide; the director of the only people-centered U.S. human rights network with ECOSOC status and consistent U.N. advocacy; the youngest elected Chair of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and leader of UNITY/the United National Indian Tribal Youth; and the former Chair of the United Nations Working Group on People of African Descent and a judge of the Permanent People’s Tribunal. They are majority women and majority Global South-rooted, from India, Eritrea, Haiti, France, Puerto Rico, the USA and elsewhere. (See list at [tribunal2021.com/panel-of-jurists](https://tribunal2021.com/panel-of-jurists).)

These jurists will preside over two days of testimonies from impacted victims, expert witnesses, and attorneys with first-hand knowledge of specific incidents raised in the charges/indictment.

At the Tribunal, a team of experienced human rights attorneys, acting as prosecutors on behalf of U.S. Black, Brown, and Indigenous people as a class, will be charging the U.S., state and local governments with human and civil rights violations under the following five sections:

- Racist police killings of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Hyper/mass incarcerations of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Political incarceration of Civil Rights/National Liberation era revolutionaries and revolutionaries and activists, as well as present-day activists,
- Environmental racism and its disparate impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Public health racism and its traumatic and disparate impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

As a result of the historic and systemic charges of all the above, the overarching charge of genocide will also be argued, based on 18 USC Sec. 1091 (the [U.S. statute making genocide a felony](#)) and the [1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention of Genocide](#).

The Panel of Jurists will deliver its Verdict following deliberations and discussions, planned for delivery at the Church Center for the United Nations on Monday, October 25, 2021.

Between the Verdict of the independent Jurists and the ongoing work of the *Spirit of Mandela* coalition, the lessons of the past will be brought forward to build U.S.-based human rights movements into the future. With these bold visions and newly produced tools, organizers hope that continued repressive measures, including the warehousing of political prisoners, will be left in the past as we step back from the specter of genocide and struggle together for lasting liberation.

**[Background on the 2021 Tribunal and planned next steps are here.](#)**

For more on efforts to free U.S. political prisoners from the 1980s to 2008, see *Let Freedom Ring: A Collection of Documents from the Movements to Free U.S. Political Prisoners*, Matt Meyer, ed. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008). See also the [National Jericho Movement website](#) and the [Northeast Political Prisoner Coalition's Facebook page](#).

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