

Tariq Ramadan: Oxford Professor, Detention Without Trial

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When Tariq Ramadan, the respected Oxford Professor of Islamic Studies, voluntarily flew from London to Paris to be questioned over rape allegations, which he vehemently denied and for which evidence is yet nowhere to be found, he must have been confident he was not walking in through the iron gates of an Al-Shabab court somewhere in Africa. That was Paris, 2nd of February 2018, some half a year ago. Professor Tariq Ramadan walked in but he was not allowed to walk out with his basic human right to presumption of innocence until proven guilty. For the next 45 days, being held in solitary confinement, Professor Ramadan was completely denied any family contact, with his lawyer M Emmanuel Marsigny himself at times kept in the dark as to his whereabouts. All that, while held in limbo and treated on equal footing with a war criminal but the plaintiffs, on the other hand, were afforded media spotlight and celebrity fanfare without being expected to provide any proof to warrant their deeply flawed, inconsistent and inordinate accusations based on contradictory narrations.

Moreover, Tariq Ramadan's unjustified preventive detention has not ceased as it should have, upon the establishing of his seriously deteriorating health. Given his rigorous routine healthcare, Professor Tariq Ramadan was in good shape when he first arrived at Fleury-Mérogis prison on the 2nd of February 2018. Although already diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, he was used to bearing the tingling feelings in his legs and finger tips. Within 15 days of his incarceration, reports show the tingling worsened, intensifying from the toes to the hips as well as half of both his hands. In addition, consistent migraines as well as painful cramps emerged. He started having difficulty in sensation and movement of limbs. A campaign report released in early July, indicates that on the 20th of March he was moved to Fresnes prison despite having experienced four emergency hospitalizations at Fleury-Mérogis prison. On the 12th of June, Professor Ramadan was once again admitted to the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital, where the neurologist noted serious and potentially irreversible health deterioration on many levels, including inability to move without a walker, general loss of sensation, loss of memory, loss of ability to concentrate, Paresthesia, incontinence and a host of other symptoms with debilitating effects.

During this detention period, his neurological complications had acutely worsened. Repeated requests for bail by his defence team have been denied. This, in complete disregard of the verdict of the chief prison medical authority that Professor Ramadan's health condition is incompatible with the ongoing incarceration. Proposals put forward by the defence lawyers for house arrest with an electronic monitoring device, surrender of his Swiss passport and to report daily to the police, are still being rejected. The magistrates'

insensitivity for Professor Ramadan's physical and psychological wellbeing, has led the defence team to suspect a systematically biased investigation, rife with consistent denial of due legal process.

Some pointed out that although the case against Professor Ramadan was advanced under the banner of the 'Me too#' movement, fingerprints of a potential Islamophobic motive are all over the case. In a country where Marine Le Pen's far-right secured one third of the run-off vote against the current centrist president, Emmanuel Macron, this explanation is not far-fetched. When the first plaintiff filed her complaint against the defendant at the Rouen prosecutor's office, for some unknown reason the file was directed to the Paris prosecutor's office who specialises in dealing with terrorism cases!

All this happened while two of President Macron's current ministers, both under the same 'Me too#' feminist campaign accusing Professor Ramadan, are allowed to continue in office without restrictions.

Furthermore, the case of the second plaintiff cannot be more islamophobically explicit. An avowed far-right militant, Paule-Emma A or "Christelle," admitted to "forging false email accounts in Professor Ramadan's name to discredit his reputation". Meanwhile, the third probe of plaintiff Mounia (Marie) was dismissed by judges as baseless allegations in the first and only hearing afforded to Professor Ramadan, held on the 5th of June.

In conjunction with the next hearing set for 18th and 19th July and alarmed by the deteriorating health of Professor Ramadan, the international campaign groups have announced 17th of July 2018, as International Day of Action at French embassies to denounce the unjust treatment of Professor Tariq Ramadan. Meanwhile, on 17th of July, at 6 pm, the official support committee will be holding a peaceful vigil at Paris's Fresnes prison. In an adjunct letter addressed to French embassies, the undersigned activists underscore the risk of losing trust in the French legal system for every occasion "when the values of liberté, égalité, and fraternité seem not to apply to Muslims and people of color in France". The primary aim of this campaign is for bail to be granted to Professor Ramadan, so he can urgently receive the needed treatment for his deteriorating health, and be allowed to communicate with his family.

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Elma Berisha is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

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