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**Press Conference condemns PA DOC cruel hoax
that claimed Mumia Abu-Jamal was ill with COVID19**

When a PA Department of Corrections official falsely claimed Mumia Abu-Jamal was being hospitalized with COVID-19 at 5pm on April 15, the news was shared worldwide in minutes. Supporters around the world, who have been misled by DOC statements in the past, immediately called the institution and demanded confirmation from Mumia himself. By 8:45pm, the DOC allowed Mumia to call his supporters and he confirmed that the official report was false. “I am fine, I am not hospitalized,” he can be heard on the recorded call saying, part of which was played at the press conference, “...What I need is freedom.”

The whole incident adds to a long list of lies and misinformation by the PA DOC since Mumia was first unjustly incarcerated in 1982. Why did a person at the SCI Mahanoy Superintendent’s Office on an official phone tell a concerned advocate that Mumia was being hospitalized with COVID-19?

How would you react if someone in authority falsely told you your elderly relative was sick with COVID-19? As a concerned person, you would be outraged. So were the participants in the April 16 virtual press conference.

Santiago Alvarez, the UC Santa Cruz student who called the prison, not only described the [recorded](#) conversation he had with the DOC official but played a portion of it. The person clearly said “Mumia was taken to the hospital 30 minutes ago ... suffering from headaches and breathing problems ... to be tested for COVID-19 as a precaution.”

Johanna Fernandez, Baruch College professor whose uncle died as a result of the pandemic last week, explained US prisons have the highest rates of infection in the world. She demanded that the official's callous misinformation, which was recorded, should lead to disciplinary procedures and his firing.

Temple Professor and activist Marc Lamont Hill exposed high rates of infection at Rikers Island prison many times worse than in New York City or in Italy. He explained that imprisoning people for small crimes like gambling and prostitution basically sentences them to the possibility of death because of the pandemic. Hill called the prison spokesperson's actions "shocking -- a stunning level of cruelty and indifference."

Megan Malachi's statement from the Philadelphia activist group Philly For REAL Justice said in part: "The false statement issued by the prison in the middle of a global pandemic is yet another example of the inherent violence of mass incarceration. This cowardly attempt to spread fear amongst the family and supporters of Mumia has not stopped our efforts...to demand the release of Mumia Abu Jamal and all prisoners. Free Mumia! Free 'em all!"

Delbert Africa, recently released MOVE 9 member, recounted how these "racist, sadistic guards and staff did the same thing to me, denying I was sick, denying I was hospitalized", misleading his friends and family when he was actually very ill in prison. Calling for the release of Mumia, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Mutulu Shakur, Jalil Muntaqim and other political prisoners, he complimented the solidarity movement for forcing the DOC to take Mumia from his cell to make the call confirming his condition - a very unusual step.

Dr. Suzanne Ross described the support for Mumia by solidarity organizations in Japan, Europe and Latin America. Recounting how the movement forced the PA DOC to make hepatitis C medicine available to Mumia and other prisoners, she is in the process of filing a lawsuit forcing the state to release Mumia because they are incapable of preventing the epidemic from infecting Mumia and other prisoners.

As of April 15 there have been a total of 53 tests out of 45,000 Pennsylvania inmates with a 17% positivity rate. Officials are not testing in high enough numbers to understand the full transmission of the virus. The prison reduction mitigation efforts are not at all commensurate with the epidemic. In the last month there has only been a reduction of 474 state prisoners.

Instead of reducing incarceration numbers, the DOC is making a dire situation more tense by imposing system-wide lockdowns. On the call Mumia reported “everyone’s locked down - 23 hours in cell, 45 minutes to clean cell, shower, plug up tablet to kiosk, to the yard every 3 days - all in 45 minutes. It’s insane. The fear is getting sick and dying. Guards are in fear too.”

Abu-Jamal also mentioned Rudolph Sutton, incarcerated at SCI Phoenix, who died April 8 of respiratory distress due to COVID19, “with contributing factors of hypertensive cardiovascular disease and [liver cirrhosis](#).” Mumia also suffers from cirrhosis of the liver, caused because of the refusal of the DOC to treat him years ago for hepatitis C in a timely manner. Like Mumia, Sutton had fought for his freedom for over 30 years. Innocence Project Legal Director Nilam Sanghvi [said](#) on April 15: “Mr. Sutton should never have been incarcerated in the first place. ... His tragic death underscores the urgent need for the Governor, the Department of Corrections, the legislature, and the courts to act quickly so that another factually innocent person does not risk death in prison due to COVID-19.”

Mumia was convicted because of police, judicial and prosecutorial misconduct. Like Sutton, COVID-19 threatens to end his life before he can prove his innocence.

The pandemic disproportionately affects people of color because of the effects of low wages, poor nutrition, inadequate housing and inability to pay for healthcare. Black men are hesitant to wear recommended masks to prevent infection for fear they will be falsely seen as a threat by racist whites and cops. And as in society as a whole, disproportionately imprisoned Black and Brown incarcerated prisoners face higher risks of death from the pandemic because of their increased rate of compromised health.

Organizers have planned a [series](#) of events marking Mumia’s 66th birthday from April 23 to 26, including a press conference on April 23rd, a Teach-In on 4/24, “Mumia Libre, an Instagram Live Dance Party” on April 25 and “Poetry in Motion, a 24 hour reading of Mumia’s works” on April 26. Go to <https://mobilization4mumia.com/new-events> or <https://www.facebook.com/cbmhome/> for more details.

A recording of the complete press conference can be heard at:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/tdRuBJbPykJJY6PEq0X1U4oFDKa8aaa81Sif-6dbyk-Z9SZuPjNz-7iZ2C7U0PBk>; (Access Password: W5*0&6i!)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DID-ZggdhoUa3YjvLCwvemBZY3VZTo_hzdd62oNSrrE/edit?usp=sharing