

Justice for Habib 'Paps' Ullah – Sunday 3rd July 2011 Vigil



“We’re here and we’re not going to go away...”

Never having previously attended an event of such feeling and significance in my life, I was lost for what to expect from the third anniversary marking the death of Habib Ullah. The vigil was like a tree of emotion; a single trunk of a strong mutual passion which supported the separate branches of individual experiences, on the common ground of justice.

On Sunday the third of July, we arrived at 4pm to a crowd of support; about 20 people stood outside the High Wycombe Police Station ready for hours of peaceful protest. A large proportion of the supporters had travelled from afar; for example London and Birmingham. It is unfortunate however that a case of such importance in High Wycombe was attended by so few local citizens. Neither was it attended by local politicians and councillors; Saqib Deshmukh, a spokesman for the Ullah family, said “Their absence speaks volumes”. The feature which stood out the most was the 15 foot banner which was hung with pride outside the police station. The banner which read ‘United families and friends campaign. No more deaths in custody’ accurately summed up the aim of the campaign. It caught the eye of each car which passed and supporters distributed many leaflets, attempting to increase awareness of the cause.

Throughout the first of 4 hours, the supporters exchanged opinions on the subject of civil liberties and the death of Habib Ullah; it was here that the fury and loss of faith in the state became apparent. “When the police start killing, society loses its confidence”, said Mrs Tariq, a supporter who has attended these vigils over the years, still filled with the same level of feeling about the case. The significant aspect of the case, as said by Julia, another supporter, is that, “They don’t just kill one person, they kill the whole family.” There are a huge number of family members suffering in pain who still continue to fight. I was given the opportunity to talk to Doreen Jjuuko whose son, Ricky Bishop, died in the custody of Brixton Police in 2001. Her words came with fierce passion; when handed the megaphone, she

called to the police in the station shouting “No justice, no peace!” and later said, “I won’t rest until I get justice.” People are still turning up with the same thirst for justice because the huge problem of abuse of power has not been solved and as passionately portrayed by Mrs Jjuuko, “We’re here and we’re not going to go away.”

There are a significant number of other campaigns questioning deaths in custody which indicates the strength of feeling about this issue. As Zia Ullah, family representative, said, “This campaign is about power to the people.” Saqib and Zia are the roots of the campaign; during his speech Saqib spoke of Marcus Cottoy, a young black man who died in custody 9 months after Habib, in the custody of the same police force, “They thought that they could get away with these things, but we’re here, and we’re not giving up.” – the words of Saqib as he captured the thoughts of the participants. There have also been cases of two black men who died in custody in Birmingham within the space of two months; their families are still fighting for a answers. Saqib quoted a statistic: “Since 1969, there has not been a conviction of a serving police officer” this shocked me and made me think about why.

The campaign is waiting on a number of verdicts; meanwhile families, friends and supporters unite to support each other. As Saqib said, “It’s the third anniversary of his death and it’s a way for the family to come together with supporters and friends.”

Neelam Tailor, Freelance journalist, July 2011