



Parole opportunity for Mário

Tue, 08/05/2007 - 22:00

Mário Bango, a young Roma imprisoned since 2001 for defending his brother against a racist attack, will be able to apply for early release in October of this year. As he says in his latest letter from Ilava, the hardest prison in Slovakia: ?I think I have a great chance because they forgave me two years and this is a lot. But we must do everything we can to take this chance ? it really will be a great success if I can be free. I can't imagine it. Really freedom ? incredible!!!?

Now 25 years old, Mário has been in prison over six years. In his letter he refers to his last appeal at the Supreme Court in August 2004 where they failed to overturn his conviction for attempted murder but reduced his sentence from the maximum of 12 years to 10 years. Last summer, his attempt to challenge the conviction at the constitutional level also failed. His only chance left is to take his case to the European court ? but this could take years.

Now he has the chance of getting out of prison early on ?save control?. Because Mário was sentenced under the old Slovakian criminal code, he is eligible for parole after six years and eight months, instead of the seven and a half years stipulated in the new criminal code. But the decision still lies in the hands of a judge ? and in Slovakia Roma face institutional racism, which means they are systematically marginalised and discriminated against in employment, housing, education and the judicial system. In Eastern Slovakia, unemployment can be as high as 93% in Roma communities.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2004 that concluded ?the Roma minority remains severely disadvantaged in most areas of life, particularly in the fields of housing, employment and education.? Accordingly, the proclaimed goal of improving the situation of the Roma ?has not been translated into adequate resources and a concerted interest and commitment on the part of all the administrative sectors involved.? The Slovak Republic was brought before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2004 to monitor its progress to end racial discrimination, including measures undertaken to remedy the serious human rights issues Roma face.

Mário has been battling state racism throughout his case, from the moment of arrest (even though he had called the ambulance and waited for the police to arrive) through his court case and numerous appeals. In order to win his freedom, he needs a strong lawyer. The Free Mário Bango Campaign is launching a fundraising drive to raise the money necessary ? if you would like to make a donation for Mário's fighting fund, please send a cheque to Free Mário Bango, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX or directly to Free Mário Bango Campaign, Nationwide, Sort Code 070093, Bank Account Number: 33333334, Reference number 0270/703 851 924.

Mário also needs a guarantee for work in order to fulfil the conditions for early release. The Free Mário Bango Campaign is working on this by contacting trade union councils, Roma and community organisations in Slovakia.

But he also needs our support. Please send him letter of encouragement to know that there are people on the outside fighting for his release.

Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982

PS41

019-17 ILAVA

Slovensko/Slovakia

You can also write to the Slovakian authorities (see below for addresses and a model letter) to demand his release.

Life in prison

Mário has been attempting to use his time in prison to educate himself ? he has learned languages such as English, Spanish, French and even a little bit of Swedish so that he can communicate with people who send him letters from all across the world. He is also keen to learn German.

He continues to work in the laundry of the prison. He likes this for it gives him an opportunity to get out of his cell and talk with others, and it also makes the time pass faster. He is very keen to work when he is released. ?When I get out of prison,? he writes, ?I want to work in factory among ordinary people because I am from ordinary folk.?

He is reading books at a great speed ? mostly historical and political books. He is still not allowed to receive books or magazines from outside, nor is he allowed visitors that are not his family.

In September, after five and a half years in prison, he was given the chance to hug his mother.

Please give him your support. Raise the profile of his case at your union branch, student union meeting, community group, local campaigning group, and try to raise funds for his release. If you need more information on his case, go to www.freemario.org [1]. If you want to contact the campaign to find out more, please email freemariobango@yahoo.co.uk [2].

Mário would like to send his most heartfelt gratitude to all those that have petitioned, fundraised, supported his case and written letters while he has been in prison. He wrote: ?I must confess that I am a little nervous and am constantly thinking about possibility of parole. It will be incredible if I am on the outside. I will have a chance to talk with everyone who has supported me. I believe that it will be a good ending. It will be great success!! Standing strong.?

MODEL EMAIL/LETTER

Concerning: Mário Bango, born 8th June 1982

Dear Mr. --,

I am writing to petition for the early release of Mário Bango, who has been imprisoned for over six years for defending himself and his brother against a racially motivated attack. Because he was sentenced under the old Slovakian criminal code, he is up for parole after six years and eight months.

Mário Bango, who is of Roma nationality, has been sentenced to 10 years for attempted murder. On March 10, 2001, he and his brother were attacked on a bus by a known racist. He defended himself and seriously injured the attacker in the process. Then he himself called the police.

Mário only defended himself and his brother against racist attack. He had on his mind too that his brother had already in the past been subject to attack by racists, in one case even being seriously injured himself.

Hundreds of human rights, anti-racist and labour organisations worldwide over the past six years have consistently campaigned for the immediate release of Mário Bango from prison and the dismissal of all charges against him.

I appeal to you so that you can use your authority to intervene and release Mário so that the miscarriage of justice ends.

Yours sincerely,

SEND TO:

Slovak president Ivan Gasparovic

Kancelaria prezidenta SR

Stefanikova 14

814 38 Bratislava

ph: 00421-7-5441 6624

Ministry of Justice
Ministerstvo spravodlivosti SR
Zupne namestie 13
813 11 Bratislava
ph: 00421-7-5935 3497
fax: 00421-7-5443 0467
email: tlacove@justice.gov.sk [3]

The Government
Urad vlady SR
Namestie Slobody 1
813 70 Bratislava
ph: 00421-7-5729 5111
fax: 00421-7-5249 7595

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.freemario.org>
- [2] <mailto:freemariobango@yahoo.co.uk>
- [3] <mailto:tlacove@justice.gov.sk>