

Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 80th World Congress in Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan 29th September to 2nd October 2014

Resolution concerning Mumia Abu-Jamal, sentenced to life imprisonment without parole in the United States of America

submitted by German PEN-Center and French PEN

In 1982, journalist and author Mumia Abu-Jamal was sentenced to death after conviction of having killed Police Officer Daniel Faulkner in Philadelphia, USA. He has always denied this murder and the evidence presented was contradictory and incomplete, although the police union of Pennsylvania continued to call for him to be executed. On 7 December 2011, his death sentence was overturned and he was sentenced instead to life imprisonment without parole after several courts of appeal came to the conclusion that his initial trial was unfair and did not correspond to the legal standards guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. However, Mumia Abu-Jamal's lawyers have never succeeded in their request for him to be granted a new, fair trial.

Despite the difficult conditions of his detainment in a death cell in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, Mumia Abu-Jamal continued to work as a writer and journalist. He has written seven books in prison, giving an impressive description of the situation of the inmates of the death row. His writings have made him an internationally-reknowned activist against death penalty.

Mumia Abu Jamal continues to call for a fair trial, but since all options for appeal have been exhausted, there is no current prospect to find out the truth about Abu-Jamal's role in Officer Faulkner's death.

International jurisprudence is moving towards recognition that a life sentence without parole, without the possibility of review may amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in a case brought against the United Kingdom that that an irreducible sentence of life imprisonment violated Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on the prohibition of torture.

PEN International has long been concerned that Mumia Abu Jamal was tried in conditions which violated his right to a fair trial. It also takes the view that life sentence without parole and without the possibility of review may amount to torture or other ill-treatment and calls upon the relevant authorities in the state of Pennsylvania and at the federal level to take the necessary legal steps to ensure that Mumia Abu-Jamal is afforded an opportunity to have both his conviction for murder and his sentence of life imprisonment without parole reviewed as a matter of urgency.