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Ramona Africa is the only adult survivor of the May 13th, 1985 bombing of the MOVE family by Philadelphia police and city officials. Ramona was immediately taken into custody and eventually convicted on trumped-up charges of riot and conspiracy. She spent the next seven years in prison. Immediately upon her release in 1992, she rejoined her family's struggle to free all remaining MOVE political prisoners, including the MOVE 9 and Mumia Abu-Jamal, and to continue exposing and confronting this enslaving system. In April of this year Ramona headed a civil lawsuit against the City and its officials for the May 13th bombing which murdered 11 people, 5 of whom were children. On June 24th of this year, the jury rendered a verdict in favour of MOVE.

Today the MOVE family continues to engage in their revolutionary struggle. The following are two interviews conducted with Ramona Africa after the verdict in the civil lawsuit was announced. In upcoming issues of PNS, we hope to publish interviews that were recorded with Ramona Africa throughout the course of the civil trial (April-June 1996.)

These interviews were conducted by community-based broadcaster Pedro Sanchez for alternative radio.

Pedro Sanchez: To start, maybe you could share with us how it was to receive the news of this verdict?

Ramona Africa: I got a call around 3:10 on Monday afternoon from one of the attorneys saying that the jury had reached a verdict, and my brother Carlos and I had to immediately go down to the court. When I heard that, I felt pretty optimistic, because as of Friday, one juror had been dismissed. He came out of there crying, saying that he couldn't take any more. They had been deadlocked for five days over some particular issue, and he just wanted out. By that time, they had reached a unanimous decision as to one defendant, which I assumed was probably the City of Philadelphia. I believe they had a lot more trouble holding individual defendants liable. When the judge asked the jury if they would be any closer to reaching a final verdict if they deliberated further, they said yes. It seemed as though this one juror - who ended up getting released - was the one obstacle to them reaching a unanimous decision. This was on Friday. So when I got the call on Monday, I was optimistic. I felt that if they came up with a unanimous verdict the very next day of deliberations, the release of this one juror had made a huge difference, and had led them to hold all three defendants liable.

When I got down to the court I was cautiously optimistic, and as the judge brought the jury in and asked them about liability, they all said yes to Gregore Sambor (Police Commissioner) and William Richmond (Fire Commissioner), as well as the City of Philadelphia. I felt very good. I felt that John Africa had whooped this system again. In 1981, this government put John Africa on trial to try to defame him, tarnish his name and character, and they were not allowed to do it. A jury acquitted John Africa of every single trumped-up charge that was put on him. I felt like John Africa had whooped this system in 1981 in federal court, and again, in 1996.

R.A.: Ona MOVE! Long live revolution!.

P.S.: What would you say are the prime aspects of the strategy which resulted in this victory, in 1996?

R.A.: Keeping MOVE principles first, and not legal maneuvers. The attorneys that worked with me were very good, I had no problems with them at all. But the fact is, they are attorneys, and are used to a certain way of doing things. There were a couple of issues that came up. One was that they really believed, at the end of the presentation of our case, that Sambor and Richmond's attorneys were going to ask for a "directed verdict," which would mean the case against them being dismissed for reasons of immunity, or based on the premise that we had not proven a case against them, and that the judge would grant it. They were ready to concede certain things in that area, and were willing to let Richmond go, because they really believed that he was going to walk, and instead focus just on the City and Sambor.

My position on this was, you must be crazy. We're not conceding anything to them! If the judge is going to do that, then he's going to have to do that, but I'm not conceding anything to him, and I'm not going to assume that he's going to feel at liberty to do such a thing. And they were all saying, "the judge has already determined that if we can't prove that Richmond got an order to put the fire out and disobeyed that order, then his position would be that Richmond could not be held liable." I just said, "that's ridiculous! The man is the fire commissioner, he's a trained firefighter, that is his job, you don't need an order to do your job! If anything, you would need a specific order to prohibit you from doing what you would normally do."

"Yes, I understand that, but that's not how the judge is interpreting it," you know, just coming at everything from that legal prison that they're in. But because I wouldn't go along with it and because I made them continue fighting to keep Richmond in, I kept on feeding them information based on my belief, and Richmond was finally held liable.

Another issue was a letter which had surfaced, which the City was trying to say I wrote. They said the same thing in 1986 when I went on trial on criminal charges as well, and they'd brought in a handwriting analyst to say he'd looked at this letter and determined that it was my handwriting, which was a lie. But I was convicted of charges of riot and conspiracy back in '86, and because of that, the City felt that they could use that in this trial. But I said, as I had said before, that I did not write that letter. The City wanted me to sign a stipulation saying that if they brought in this handwriting analyst, he would testify that he'd concluded that I wrote that letter.

My attorneys were really pushing me to sign this stipulation, and I just told them, "I'm not signing that! Why would I sign something like that?" And they were all telling me, "well, it's not saying that you wrote the letter, it's just saying that if this analyst came in, that he would testify to it, and we really think that you should sign it, because we really can't afford another handwriting analyst that could possibly challenge this person's findings. We don't know if we can find an analyst who would disagree with him and challenge him, and we'll have no grounds to challenge his testimony. He's going to come in looking very professional, citing his credentials, and convince the jury that that's in fact your handwriting."

I just said, "well, it's not, and I didn't write it, and I am not about to sit back and sign a stipulation that's going to make it easier for the City. Make them spend that money, use their time, and work for what they want! They're going to have to bring this man in here and subject him to cross-examination, etc. I'm not going to make it easier for them! I'm not going to help them save their time and money and effort, and help them to work against me, you must be crazy!"

So, against their "better judgment," they had to go by what I said. We didn't sign that stipulation, and what happened? The City was forced to spend money, bringing this handwriting analyst in, and the man made a complete ass out of himself. He sat up there, all

to go all the way because she feels like she has nothing to lose. They have taken her son from her. People have to be prepared to be locked up, beat up, to have all kinds of pressure put on them and their family members. They have to be ready to accept pressure from people that just don't get it, family members who just don't understand, and want to condemn you and think you're an uncontrollable radical. You have to be ready to deal with all of that stuff.

But, the upside is that when you do step out there and make that decision to take a stand against the injustices we're confronted with every day, then you feel so good . You have to understand the reward of knowing that you're not allowing yourself to be a willing victim anymore. It's such a good feeling that it's the reward for all of the pain that we suffer at the hands of the system. Finally, we all don't have a choice. We have to do this or we will continue to be victims. We have to effectively disarm the system and let them know the threat of arrest or beatings, even death, is not going to stop us, because they're killing us anyway. We have a brother - Mumia Abu-Jamal - sitting on death row under the threat of being executed, but who amongst us is not on death row? At any time, any day of the week, we can walk out of our house and the cops can stop us. You see these police shows and news magazines where a woman can be driving from her home and a cop can stop you, pull his gun on you, drag you out of the car, and throw you down on the ground. And then blow your brains out if he chooses to, and say that you were threatening him. We're all on death row. Any of us could be executed at any time, any day of the week, and that's how we need to see it, and act accordingly. And we do that by disarming this system and letting them know that they don't have anything to threaten us with anymore. We're not threatened, we're not intimidated by the system. And we're going to come at it. No matter what, we're not going to back up.

P.S.: Thank you Ramona, and revolutionary greetings to the whole Africa family.

cent until proven guilty while you're treating us like we're guilty." We started exposing the hypocrisy of the courts, the inconsistencies in legality, and the courts could not handle it when we would stand up. We didn't just sit there arrogantly when they would try to make us stand up. We would explain why we weren't standing up. We said we thought the system was supposed to be about equality. What is equal about me standing up for you? Are you better than me? Are you better than the people? Equality means everybody's equal, ain't nobody standing up for nobody. Everybody's equal.

The only leverage that the courts had at that point was contempt of court. They couldn't deal with the information that MOVE people were putting out , so their response was to call the sheriffs and hold MOVE in contempt, which led to more beatings and more jail time, which just clogged the courts even more. They were really in a no-win situation. John Africa very effectively disarmed them because they really didn't want to arrest us anymore. When we went into court they could hold us in contempt, but they soon realized that didn't mean anything to MOVE . And the more contempt they gave us, the more we clogged up their system.

P.S.: Could you give any words of advice to community groups trying to deal with this issue of police brutality accompanied with a lack of accountability?

R.A.: Well, I'll tell you, the first thing I would say to you is that you'd better be serious. There's no half-stepping when you agree to step out and confront and deal with the injustices of the system. You have to be serious. You have to be ready to go all the way or there's no point in dealing with it. And people should be ready to go all the way because you're forced to go all the way whether you want to or not. There was a woman at the demonstration on behalf of Mumia yesterday and her son had been killed by the New York police department - literally shot down. She was not a protester, she was not someone that was out in the streets demonstrating against police brutality, but she was forced by the murder of her son to get out there and take a stand. And this woman was forced

egotistical and arrogant, saying that in his career, he's never made mistakes. He went on citing all of his schooling, but the attorneys nailed him down on his credentials and his schooling. One of the schools that he proudly stated that he went to was for mortuary sciences - to be a funeral director, which has nothing to do with being a handwriting analyst. Upon further questioning and pinning down, it was brought out that there's no accreditation for handwriting analysis in any colleges or schools, because it's basically guesswork! I mean, there are certain things that you can look for in determining handwriting consistency, but it's nothing that any college, university, or school accredits, so that worked against him. And then, the final blow was that the man said that he never made mistakes, and after being pinned down and questioned thoroughly on the issue, he was forced to admit that there were certain questionable circumstances, like one situation he had concluded that this young woman had forged a check, that it was her handwriting. The woman was convicted and sentenced. Shortly thereafter, another woman came forward and confessed to forging the check.

When he was asked by the attorney for the plaintiffs, "were you wrong in that case? Was that a mistake you made?", he said, "No!," that he was right. Despite all the evidence he was "right," no matter what, he was "right" and this completely discredited him. He was asked how many samples of a person's handwriting does he normally use in his analysis? He said he usually likes to have at least 25. "Well how many comparisons of Ms. Africa's handwriting did you have in this case?" "Just one, the document." That was enough for him, he didn't need any more.

P.S.: There were so many inconsistencies from the City's side of this trial. What do you think were some of the strengths on MOVE 's side that helped to convince the jury?

R.A.: One of the strongest points that the jury could not dismiss was Birdie's (the only other survivor of the bombing) testimony as well as my testimony about the police shooting at us as we tried to come out of the house. If the jurors had any common sense they

would have to think that no matter how crazy a person was, how sick they was, nobody could just sit in a building while they were being burned to death. Instinct would push them to try to get away from the fire. They had to understand that there was something that caused MOVE not to be able to escape that fire. I think they understood that the police did shoot at us. Birdie testified to that and his testimony was exactly like mine. And we had not had any contact since the bombing, with the exception of my criminal trial in 1985. So they knew we had not conspired and gotten our stories together. And in fact, Birdie told the same story to the so-called MOVE Commission back in 1985. I think that was very critical testimony.

Another compelling area of testimony was that the fire was not put out. Sambor was given an order to put the fire out and subsequently spoke with Fire Commissioner Richmond and never informed him of the order and literally conspired to let the fire burn. Along with that, Richmond tried to get out of it by saying he was never given an order to put out the fire. Our position, which was very simple and very clear, was that the Fire Commissioner doesn't need an order to put out the fire. That is his job. That is what he is supposed to do. We were able to show that Richmond knew there was a fire on the roof , according to his own admission, at least 20 minutes before his discussion with Sambor. From that point on, throughout that 20 minutes, he did absolutely nothing to put that fire out. So you don't even have to worry about whether he talked with Sambor and deferred to Sambor as to whether or not to put the fire out. For 20 minutes he made his own personal decision not to do anything to fight the fire, which made him liable.

All was Quiet!

The last, most compelling area that was in our favor, was the fact that for hours, hours, prior to the 5:27 dropping of the bomb, it was absolutely quiet. There was absolutely nothing going on. No gunfire or anything. So there was no threat to police. And their own directives say that the only time they're allowed to use deadly

of immunity and confusion and other things in the courtroom. R.A.: You're absolutely right. In the very early days MOVE people began to be assaulted by police. Pregnant MOVE women were beat into miscarriage. We racked up hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of arrests. We didn't start out confronting the court system and going into court. We were having peaceful demonstrations at the Philadelphia Zoo, at unsafe boarding homes for the elderly, the board of education, and the police started coming at us and attacking us, to stop our demonstrations. Once they started putting us in the court system, it was the strategy of John Africa to clog the court system to let them know, "you want to arrest MOVE people? You want to put us in the court system? OK, but you're going to have to do it consistently." And we were going in and out of jail so much that we racked up so many cases that it clogged the court system. They could not handle it. You know that story of the snake? The one that can swallow a whole pig? And you can see it? Well, literally, that is what was happening, and you could see this big huge lump of MOVE cases that just clogged the court system to the point where the courts had to start dismissing some of these cases because they couldn't handle it.Not only that, but when we did go to court, we confronted them, and exposed the system. We would not stand up for judges when they came in. When judges spoke their jargon that so many people accepted, like "Do you understand that you're innocent until proven guilty? MOVE people didn't just stand there meekly and say "Yes, your honor." We said "Hell, no we don't understand that we're innocent until proven guilty. Was we innocent when we was beat with those blackjacks by the cops? Is that how you treat innocent people? While we was locked up and taken to the police administration building, we're supposed to assume that we're innocent?" And if MOVE people were coming from prison and not coming from the street, having been bailed out on that particular case, we would say , "we came from jail - the house of correction, and that's how you treat innocent people? We're supposed to stand up here and hallucinate that we're inno-

not responsible for their actions? Isn't that what people teach children? All throughout Philadelphia history, police have randomly gone through poor white communities, poor Black or Latino communities and shot, killed, arrested illegally, beat to death, and beat up people. Never once have they been held accountable.

In fact, the Rodney King beating was light compared to the beating that my brother Delbert Africa took on August 8th of 1978 at MOVE headquarters and this too was caught on videotape. Unlike the situation with Rodney King, these policemen were also put on a jury trial, and while the jurors acquitted the cops, in Rodney King's case, the jurors that were imported into Philadelphia from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the trial of the policemen that beat my brother Delbert weren't allowed to even make the decision. Judge Stanley Kabaki dismissed the jury and said that he would take care of it. After viewing the graphic videotaped beating of Delbert, and after hearing testimony from the cops who never denied what they did - they just said that they were emotional - the judge said there had been too much bloodshed at the hands of MOVE, that he was going to be the lightning rod to stop the flow of blood. And he proceeded to acquit those cops. This is the kind of double standard that has been the case historically in this country. He's saying that he's not denying what the cops did, but they were immune from any liability. They just got upset. That concept of immunity has really expanded from its inception, and the inception of such a concept is completely unacceptable to MOVE . It's completely wrong. P.S.: Before August 8th, 1978 which was quite a high profile assault at MOVE organization's headquarters, there were small confrontations with the police, daily situations with the police which even resulted in a fatality for the MOVE organization, as well as a lot of hurt people in many different ways, [such as]false arrests. [This resulted in] MOVE entering the courtroom in the early '70s to deal with some of these issues of lack of accountability. Maybe you could reflect on that time and perhaps how MOVE's strategy began to develop while you were being confronted by these walls

force - and a bomb is most certainly deadly force - is if their lives or the lives of someone else is in imminent danger.

P.S.: The City of Philadelphia throughout the trial tried to portray the MOVE organization as a criminal organization of outlaws. How were you able to use that against the City and bring MOVE's reality and MOVE's legitimacy into the courtroom?

R.A.: By forcing the City to do something that they couldn't do: to prove that we had done something criminal, that we were this terrorist, criminal organization. And they couldn't do it. We had never shot at anybody, attacked anybody, kidnapped or robbed anybody. We had done nothing. The only thing they could say about us was that they didn't like us as neighbors because we used loudspeakers, or we had boards across our windows. They could not show that we were criminal in any way. We willingly admitted that, "Yes, we resist authority. Yes, we confront and expose the system. No, we don't put priority on, or care about, legal laws." As well we shouldn't.

And when we first admit that, people are like: "You have to have legal laws; you have to obey legal laws, nobody has the right to go outside of authority." And what we were able to show is that yes, the people do. After all, at one point slavery was legal. And if people had not fought that, and if slaves themselves had not revolted against that illegally, then slavery might still exist. Slavery was legal, but it wasn't right. And we were able to use other examples that the middle -class or working-class white suburban jurors could relate to. And that example being Paul Revere, and Nathan Hale and Patrick Henry and such people. They went to war with the government. They defied legality in favor of what they determined to be right. And today they're celebrated as heroes every Fourth of July. So we were able to use, I was able to put those examples out, to show people that there are times when you have to defy legality and confront the government when they're wrong.

P.S.: I know that during the trial you were able to show a video of Delbert Africa's 1978 beating by the Philadelphia police. What

has the trial meant in terms of bringing the issue of the MOVE 9 to the forefront?

R.A.: We were able to do that, in fact the City helped do that for us because while not one single police official, not one cop or the former police Commissioner Sambor was ever willing to admit that they saw the videotape. They were willing to admit that they knew about the beating of Delbert, but not one was willing to admit that they saw the videotape. They were absolutely lying. You can not tell me that Sambor did not see the videotape. In fact, the video of August 8th is used in police training procedures. They watch T.V. I know they've seen it on the news. But they would not admit that they saw it because they knew that to admit that they saw the video gave us the opening to show the videotape and say "Is this what you saw?" They fought tooth and nail because they didn't want the jury to see that.

The way we were able to get it in before the jury was for me to say, "Yes, I was aware of the beating of Delbert. Yes, I saw that videotape." And then we showed it and I was able to say, "Yes, that is the video tape that I saw." And that was important not only for May 13th, to show that MOVE people could not just come out of that house without fearing that we would be beat or shot.

People would say, "Why didn't MOVE just come out when you were asked?", or "Why didn't you just come out at some point during the day?" And we would say, "Why didn't we just walk out of there? We were supposed to feel comfortable just walking out to the police when this is what happened when Delbert walked out?! And when we did try to come out we were shot at?" As far as the MOVE 9, what happened to Delbert showed the viciousness that police had toward MOVE. I'm sure that seeing that, people would feel that if these police did that, then certainly they could have tried to kill MOVE in '78. And maybe they did go a little too far, just like they did in '85. The City also helped the case by putting police and firefighters on the stand who were there not only in '85 but in '78 as well. The testimony of these cops that was supposed

to be indicting of MOVE was in fact not indicting of MOVE. And it clearly showed that MOVE was not just a bunch of terrorists or hell-bent on killing cops and firemen. Wilson Goode, the mayor of Philadelphia at the time of the bombing , testified that he had reviewed autopsy reports and Ballistic reports on policeman James Rapp, who my family is accused of killing in 1978, and he was not convinced that MOVE had killed James Ramp and that MOVE people had not gotten a fair trial and at least deserved another trial.

P.S.: In light of the killing of four youths in the City of Toronto to date this year at the hands of the police and in light of the complete lack of accountability that has accompanied these killings, I asked Ramona Africa of the MOVE organization to reflect on lack of accountability and the immunity that is enjoyed by police and other officials.

R.A.: Just the very word "immunity" itself is offensive to MOVE because our belief that's taught to us by our founder John Africa is that there's no such thing as immunity. Everybody is responsible for their actions. Under the law that MOVE believes and the law of life, I don't care if the Queen of England or Bill Clinton stands out in the rain, everybody's going to get wet. I mean, whether you're a prince or a pauper, the rain will wet anybody who comes in contact with it. There is no immunity. So that very word is offensive to MOVE. What it is, really, is a concept invented by the system to give officials a license to do whatever they want to do without being held accountable for their actions. Very recently the issue of immunity has come up in the lawsuit I filed against City officials. This dealt with the May 13 bombing and murder of MOVE family members. The judge - at this point, despite the fact that there is a judgment by the jury of liability on behalf of the City of Philadelphia as well as Sambor, the former police commissioner and Richmond the former fire commissioner - Judge Pollack still has the authority at this point to issue a ruling that they're immune from liability. It really is a sore spot with MOVE, and it really should be a sore spot to any fair-minded person. I mean, c'mon! Who is