

Michael Ross: Letter to his Supporters – April 2014

Michael wrote this letter and it was published on his website in April 2014. Michael wished to emphasise to his supporters that he was innocent of the crime for which he is serving a life sentence. This was the first time that Michael had spoken about the case publicly.

Michael writes:

I did not kill Shamsuddin Mahmood and had nothing to do with his murder. Before finding out that Shamsuddin had been murdered, I had no knowledge of him and had never encountered him. I sympathise with his family. It would be terrible to lose a loved one in this way and I feel for Shamsuddin and his family as they have still not had justice.

I first realised the police were interested in me when I was asked to attend the police station to be interviewed and I realised it was serious when I was taken away from school one day by the CID and detained for 6 hours. The police and the prosecution said at my trial that my alibi didn't stand up, but I never saw it as an alibi. I just told police the truth about what I had been doing at around the time of the murder. I would imagine if someone was going to do something bad that needed an alibi, you would want someone you would trust and would vouch for you if they were questioned by the police.

The police suggested that the motive for murder was racism and that I was racist. I am not racist and never have been. They say I was racist because of silly little scribbles in school jotters and inappropriate comments I made as an immature boy. I am embarrassed at these things, but it was just me as an adolescent trying to fit in with the other boys. At the age of 16, I joined the army, served overseas, and worked closely with people from different parts of the world and different cultures and I never had any problems with anyone. The suggestion that I'm racist on adolescent scribbles and remarks is ridiculous and offensive to me.

When my Dad was wrongly convicted, it was really hard on all my family, especially my Mum and sister. I was away with the army but I tried to help by sending money home to help Mum out. My Dad's wrongful conviction showed us that the Scottish legal system couldn't be trusted.

Over the years the Mumutaz murder would be in the news from time to time and very often I would be mentioned in relation to it. This felt like a form of harassment to me and my family. When I first met my wife I explained to her about me being accused of murder and all the questioning from the police. I've always been open about it all to friends and people that have asked.

In 2006 when I came back from Iraq to serve in Northern Ireland I started to get a bad feeling in my gut similar to what I'd felt in Iraq just before my platoon was hit in a suicide bombing. There were stories coming in the papers saying there was more evidence and the army asked me if I wanted a lawyer. I said "no" because I knew it would be more rubbish. I was arrested in 2007 and it was a shock to the system. After talking to my lawyers and hearing about William

Grant and his new evidence I thought I would be okay. I knew I hadn't done anything wrong and thought a jury would realise that Grant was lying. It was scary going to trial knowing it had all been brought about by obvious lies. Despite my Dad's wrongful conviction I still had some faith in the legal system as I thought it would be clear to see by all at trial that Grant had made up his statements and had some alternative motive in his lies.

I never gave evidence at trial. Some people may think this strange or that I was being evasive. I have talked to groups of people before as part of my job as an army instructor, but talking at trial would have been a nightmare for me as I would have been nervous. The prosecution lawyers are trained to rip apart what has been said and I watched them continually trip up and turn around or spin what other witnesses were saying, so I would not have been confident talking at trial. My QC advised me not to and I didn't know any better. If I had the chance again, I would give evidence.

My wrongful imprisonment has been devastating to my family. I have missed half of my children's lives. They have been growing up without their Dad during some of the most important parts of their development. My wife has been forced to become a single mother with all of the hardships that go with that. My children and my wife miss me dreadfully and I them. It's really hard for us to be apart all the time. We talk on the phone daily but it's not the same as having normal family contact. We have tried to keep a lot from my girls just to protect them from all the upset. My oldest girl has lots of questions for me and I have been answering them as best I can. We only get to see each other several times a year at visits and it's hard with the expense and distance to travel, not to mention the stress on my wife and kids coming into the prison. It's also hard not seeing my parents as much as I'd like. I have simple hopes for the future. All I want is to be back home with my wife and children, to spend time with my family and get a job and work for a living.

I pass my days now by keeping myself fit and reading. I've been privileged to have a mass of support from people at home, good friends and my family. I am so grateful for all the support that people have given me and I would be in a darker place without that support.

I hope the SCCRC can bring my case back to court to be looked at properly. So far we have had nothing but false hope from the legal system. I want my case to be taken back to trial to be examined by unbiased eyes and this should allow me to go free and help in getting closer to justice for Shamsuddin and his family.

This letter was published in April 2014. The SCCRC issued a 'Statement of Reasons' in July 2014, refusing to refer this case back to the Court of Appeal. Michael's campaign group challenged the decision; however, unfortunately the challenge failed and the SCCRC issued a final refusal in November 2015.