

Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem



The Journal of Pan African Studies joins the Pan African world community in paying tribute to the life and work of the late Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem who joined the ancestors on African Liberation Day (2009). Justice Africa (www.justiceafrica.org), an advocacy organization and research institute founded in 1999 in London to campaign for human rights and social justice across Africa and Pambazuka News (www.pambazuka.org), an on-line Pan African forum for social justice in Africa composed of some 300 citizens and organizations invite you to leave your thoughts and tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem at their websites. The following biographical profile is provided courtesy of Africa Justice (May 25, 2009).

Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, the most irrepressible Pan Africanist of his generation, died in Nairobi on 24 May 2009. His friends and colleagues are stunned at the loss of a man who was so full of life and humour, such a determined Afro-optimist, and such a devoted father to his children, Aisha and Aida. Africa is impoverished by his untimely death.

Tajudeen was born in Funtua, Katsina State, Nigeria, in 1961. His commitment to his home town and family remained undimmed throughout his life. He was educated at Government Schools in Funtua from where he went to Bayero University, Kano, where he graduated with a first class honours degree. He was winner of the Nigerian Government's Merit Award as the best student of Political Science, between 1980-82 at Bayero University.

After his National Youth Service, Tajudeen applied for a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. He challenged the selection committee by dressing in traditional style for his interview and exam and demanding why they should want to associate someone like him with the name of the grand imperialist, Cecil Rhodes. To the credit of the Rhodes Scholarship, they selected him and Tajudeen spent three years at St. Peter's College, Oxford, writing his D.Phil. degree in politics. While there, he invigorated the Africa Society (serving as president) and injected his unique mix of humour, anecdote, sharp political analysis and enthusiastic optimism into the university's African debates.

Tajudeen was engaged in an astonishing range of African and anti-imperial activities including the Pan African Movement, the All African Anti-Imperialist Youth Front, the Movement for Awareness and Advancement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Save the Sharpeville Six Campaign and several magazines including the Africa Research and Information Bureau (ARIB).

Tajudeen was an energetic journalist and writer, commenting regularly on contemporary Africa in newspapers, magazines, journals and radio. Those who knew him cannot forget his rapid one-fingered typing, bold and articulate and immediately dispatched into the public realm without a spell-check. He was fearless in denouncing hypocrisy or abuses wherever he encountered them, from whatever quarter. He was as resolute in condemning the violations of Africa's dictators and warlords as he was in pointing the finger at the double standards of international agencies and the shortcomings of Africa's would-be liberators.

Tajudeen's candid lack of guile and good humour enabled him to say things that for many others were unsayable, and to ask the most difficult questions without provoking defensiveness. At the time of the constitutional referendum in Zimbabwe, he demanded of the government, "what happens if you lose?" and of the opposition, "what happens if you win?", discovering that neither had planned for this. He castigated his Pan Africanist allies in government without hesitation when they fell short. When told that Kofi Annan had won the Nobel Peace Prize he famously retorted, "For what?" Tajudeen broadcast for the BBC's World Service Programmes on Africa both in Hausa and English and Voice of America (VOA). He was editor of the journal, *Africa World Review* and edited the book *Pan Africanism in the 21st Century* (Pluto Press, 1996) which included contributions from the OAU Secretary General, Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Professor Horace Campbell and other leading figures in the Pan African Movement.

Tajudeen wrote many academic and specialist journals, including *Review of African Political Economy* (ROAPE), *Journal of African Marxists* (JAM), *Southern Africa Political Economy Monthly* (SAPEM), *New Internationalist*, and *International Journal of Development*. He became widely known for his regular column *Tajudeen's Thursday Postcard* for Uganda's largest selling national newspaper, *The New Vision*, which was syndicated in a number of other African newspapers such as *The Weekly Mirror* (Harare), *The Daily News* (Harare) *The Weekly* (Dar es Salaam), *The Weekly Trust* (Kaduna) and occasionally in the *Business Day* (Johannesburg). Tajudeen was also a columnist for the journal, *Democracy and Development*, published by the Centre for Democracy and Development, of which he chaired the International Governing Council. Tajudeen lectured at a number of colleges including the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London and Goldsmith College London and several universities in the USA. He was a visiting UNESCO professor at the Centre for Global Studies, University of Trier, Germany. Beneath his exuberant public persona and wit, he levelled incisive analysis and a sound elaboration of the political economy of African crisis.

Tajudeen's lectures were always unforgettable due to his refreshing honesty, command of language and superb sense of dramatic timing. Speaking to a human rights conference in the UN conference centre in Addis Ababa in 1996 on the then-unfolding war in Zaire, the electricity suddenly went off and he declaimed, "Even speaking of Mobutu makes the lights go out!" In the same hall a few years later he challenged Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, noting that European and American delegates to the conference could get an Ethiopian visa at the airport—but not Africans. "How can this happen in the capital of Africa?" he demanded. Prime Minister Meles said that no answer could match the passion of Tajudeen's questioning. A couple of weeks later the Ethiopian government waived visa regulations for African delegates to international conferences.

In 1992 Tajudeen was appointed General-Secretary for the Secretariat organizing the Seventh Pan African Congress in Kampala, Uganda. Held in 1994 with delegates from 47 countries, this was the largest Pan African gathering for twenty years. The theme was 'Africa: Facing the Future in Unity, Social Progress and Democracy'. But the Congress was overshadowed by the unfolding genocide in Rwanda. A delegation from the Pan African Movement travelled with the RPF to Rwanda, falling into an ambush near Kigali from which Tajudeen was lucky to escape unscathed.

Thereafter, he was closely involved in the Pan African mobilization to respond to the crisis in the Great Lakes and Zaire—though he became critical of the record of the liberation movements in power and at the time of his death was working on a historical account and political analysis of the liberators and where they had gone astray. Tajudeen often bemoaned the fact that so many of the giants of African liberation had passed away without writing their memoirs, and that the treasures of Africa's history, as forged by Africans and written by Africans, were passing without record. It is a sad irony that much of his own life will remain insufficiently recorded, though still vibrant in the memories of his innumerable friends. Tajudeen was a Director of Justice Africa, Chairperson for the Pan African Development Education and Advocacy Programme (PADEAP) and Chair of the International Governing Council of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). He joined the United Nations as its coordinator for outreach on the Millennium Development Goals in Africa, and was living and working from a base in Nairobi in recent years. Tajudeen never allowed his critical sense degenerate into cynicism or disillusion. His confidence in Africa and Africans to resolve their problems, whatever the setbacks, was always undimmed. His untimely death leaves a vacuum of human energy and hope that will be difficult to fill. Tajudeen was married to Mounira Chaieb and has two daughters, Aisha and Aida, to whom he was completely devoted. Our thoughts are with them in their inconsolable loss.