

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION 08.09.03
Roger Sylvester inquest to commence after four and a half years

Today the long awaited inquest of Roger Sylvester will commence. After nearly five years of waiting his family will finally be able to hear the evidence of the circumstances surrounding their son's death. Leading INQUEST lawyers group members Ian Macdonald QC and Terry Munyard (2 Garden Court Chambers) will be representing the family at the inquest and the family's solicitor is Raju Bhatt from Bhatt Murphy solicitors.

Roger was a 30-year-old healthy black man who died after being handcuffed and restrained by 8 Metropolitan police officers in Tottenham in January 1999. INQUEST has been working with the Sylvester family since his death and believe Roger's case raises many issues that go beyond the remit of the current inquest system. We are particularly concerned about police restraint methods and the disproportionate number of black men who have died in police custody following the use of force. The investigation into his death carried out by Essex police under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority was passed to the CPS in October 1999. 13 months later in November 2000 they announced the inevitable decision that no police officer would face criminal charges. When the family sought to challenge this decision Lord Chief Justice Woolf ruled in May 2001 that the challenge should await the outcome of the inquest. Some two years went by before the arrival of a new coroner at St Pancras resulted in action earlier this year leading to the forthcoming hearing.

"The treatment of Roger Sylvester's family by the criminal justice system has been utterly shameful and characterised by delay, misinformation and secrecy. Their lives have been on hold since his death. This inquest is the first opportunity to find out what happened to Roger and is the first time his death has been subject to any public scrutiny." Deborah Coles INQUEST

"Due to the stress caused by not knowing what was done to Roger my physical health has deteriorated, I feel so worn-out. The process and the police officers have taken their toll on me. After 4 years 7 months, I have to relive the trauma of what happened. To compound this, the inquest is only going to look at how my Roger died, not why." Sheila Sylvester – Roger's mother

We have created a press pack, detailing the work that INQUEST and the Sylvester family have done during the years leading up to the inquest. The pack also contains information about Roger's life and paints a picture of how he touched the lives of those around him.