

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE NOVEMBER 26<sup>th</sup> 2004**

## **SYLVESTER FAMILY APPALLED BY OUTCOME OF JUDICIAL REVIEW**

The family of Roger Sylvester decided not to attend the handing down of the judgement at today's court hearing.

Mr Justice Collins has formally quashed the unlawful killing verdict returned by an independent jury in the inquest of Roger Sylvester. He said that the summing up by the coroner, Andrew Reid, was defective and that some of the reasons the jury gave for their verdict were inconsistent.

Roger Sylvester died as the result of the restraint in which he was held by police officers. On the evidence heard at the inquest the judge accepted that the jury could have returned an unlawful killing verdict but because of errors by the coroner and jury the verdict has been quashed. In other words the family has had an unlawful killing verdict taken away by a legal technicality.

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST said: "Roger Sylvester was a young healthy black man who died because of the fatal restraint used against him by police officers. Yet seemingly no one is to be held accountable for his death. What kind of justice system is this?"

The Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign said: "With regards to our fight for justice for Roger the judge commented that justice was for all; we couldn't agree more. Our fight for justice was not just for Roger it was for all the other people who have died and continue to die in custody and for the victims they leave behind."

The family were represented at the hearing by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Paddy O'Connor QC and Phillipa Kaufman of Doughty Street Chambers instructed by Raju Bhatt of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.

### **Notes to Editors**

#### **Case**

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. 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

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Complaints Authority was passed to the CPS in October 1999. 13 months later in November 2000 they announced their 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 the inquest being heard and an unlawful killing verdict being returned in October 2003. When news leaked out the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) had agreed to fund the police officers' challenge to the inquest verdict, INQUEST and the family successfully campaigned for similar funding for the Sylvester family.

## **INQUEST**

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the Coroner's Courts.