

Justice for Aafia US Tour Diary: Day 4 - Alabama

Contributed by Yvonne Ridley
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Sweet Home Alabama is the title of a 2002 Hollywood movie as well as a 70s hit for the rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd, and it is a phrase that seemed to be on every other car registration plate I saw this evening as I made my way to Birmingham University in the Deep South of America.

I later learned that earlier this year the State of Alabama adopted the phrase as its official slogan on motor vehicle license plates.

Myself and Saghir Hussein from Cageprisoners were joined by civil rights activist El Hajj Mauri Salakan and Khalil Meek from the Muslim legal Foundation of America on a platform to address a lively, largely student audience about the injustices in the Muslim community largely due to the War on Terror.

It was a successful event and, as you would expect, everyone left with a hardened resolve to do what they could to help Dr Aafia Siddiqui whom I had highlighted as a woman denied justice for more than six years since she and her three children were abducted from Karachi in March 2003.

Tonight as I write to you I began to think more and more about the significance of the phrase "Sweet Home Alabama" and realised with great sadness that Dr Aafia had not experienced her 'Sweet Home' for many years.

You see it doesn't matter where in the world we live and work, home is where the family is and Dr Aafia has been denied her family since that dreadful night she was ripped apart from her three children.

Most of you reading this column in the Tehreek e-Insaf website are familiar with her tragic story thanks to the relentless campaigning done by your leader Imran Khan.

But just a few hours ago many of the Alabama students I addressed sat in disbelief as I relayed the story to them.

One of the many things I asked them to do as part of a campaign to raise awareness about Aafia was to write to her or send a card to let her know that while she may sit alone in an isolation cell, she is not forgotten.

So after you read this I want you to do two things. The first is look around and appreciate your loved ones and think about those who complete your 'Sweet Home' and the second is to send a short message to our dear sister and tell her she is not alone.

Send your mail to: Dr Aafia Siddiqui, 90279-054, MDC Brooklyn, Metropolitan Detention Center, PO Box 329002. Brooklyn, NY 11232.

And remember, until she is reunited with her mother, brother, sister and her own three children in Pakistan, we're about the nearest thing she has to family these days.

My next destination is Georgia ... more news tomorrow.