



## **URGENT MEDIA APPEAL**

**“ I DID NOT  
KIDNAP MY  
DAUGHTER ”**

*- Rokia Traoré*

**#FREEROKIATRAORE**

**Re: Urgent Appeal: A Poignant Letter from Rokia Traoré's Jail Cell in Italy – Five Years of Legal Injustice by European Courts**

Rokia Traore recently wrote a letter from her jail cell in Italy where she's been held captive since June 21 when she was unfairly arrested at the airport while traveling to perform at a concert she was invited to. Her arrest was based on a European Arrest Warrant issued by Belgium following an unjustifiable 2-year sentence for allegedly kidnapping her own daughter based on false claims made by the father.

We are writing on behalf of the Free Rokia Traoré Movement, a coalition of friends, family members, and women's rights advocates dedicated to securing justice for Rokia Traoré. We urgently seek your support in bringing global attention to Rokia's plight,

which highlights critical issues in international custody battles, where countries with greater economic power use the law to favor their citizens ignoring international laws.

Rokia Traoré's story underscores critical issues regarding international custody disputes, jurisdictional boundaries, and adherence to human rights principles, particularly in cases involving African women whose voices and rights are often ignored or mocked.

**Who is Rokia Traoré?** Rokia Traoré is a celebrated Malian artist known for her unique musical style that blends traditional Malian sounds with contemporary influences. She has earned international recognition and numerous awards. Beyond her musical career, Rokia is an outspoken advocate for human rights, focusing on the rights and protection of women and children. She is a mother of two.

**Current Situation:** On June 20, 2024, Rokia Traoré was arrested at an airport in Italy while traveling to a concert scheduled for June 21, 2024. She was detained under a European arrest warrant issued by Belgian authorities, stemming from a protracted legal struggle with her former partner, Jan Gossens, over the custody of their daughter, now 9 years old.

In 2023, Rokia was unjustly condemned by Belgian courts to two years in prison following a default judgment, a decision that did not adhere to international legal standards as Rokia Traoré was not represented by a lawyer, was not legally notified, and the defense was not present during the proceedings. Following her arrest at Rome airport on June 20, the Rome Court of Appeal accepted the objections raised by Rokia Traoré's lawyer, Maddalena C. Del Re, and referred the case to the European Union Court, noting serious violations of the rights of the defense (i.e., Rokia Traoré's rights).

The first hearing before the EU Court is scheduled for September. In the meantime, Rokia remains detained in Rome. Her lawyer's recent request for house arrest was denied on July 24, 2024. An appeal has been filed with the Supreme Court against this decision. The hearing is scheduled for August 22, 2024.

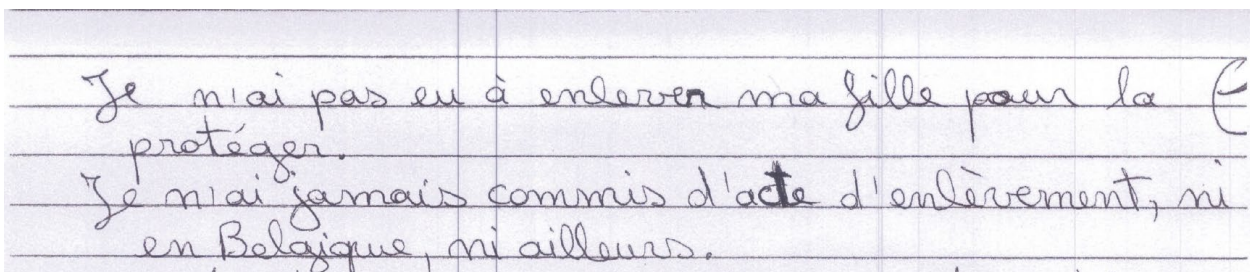
Meanwhile, the father has been using the media to spread lies about Rokia, claiming that the child was kidnapped by her mother, which is false as the child had been living with her mother in Mali since the age of 4 months by mutual agreement.

In her letter from prison, Rokia states unequivocally, "I did not have to kidnap my daughter to protect her. I have never committed an act of abduction, neither in Belgium nor elsewhere. As a mother, I have the duty to protect my children from the negative consequences of life experiences."

From her cell, Rokia explains: "Regarding the accusation that I prevented the father, a Belgian citizen, from taking our child to Belgium for holidays, this is another lie from the father, never verified by the Belgian family court. Furthermore, such an act, if it had been committed, would not have given the Belgian justice any right to conduct a family law procedure outside the limits (according to international law and the 1989 Hague Convention on the Rights of the Child) of its jurisdiction.

I had to protect my children while waiting for a procedure that would safeguard my daughter. This procedure is ongoing in Mali. A first judgment in 2019 by the Bamako court granted me custody of the child. Investigations were conducted.

I had also filed complaints in France and Belgium; these complaints were then dismissed in both European countries where the child did not live, but the father lived and worked in France until 2021, and he is of Belgian nationality."



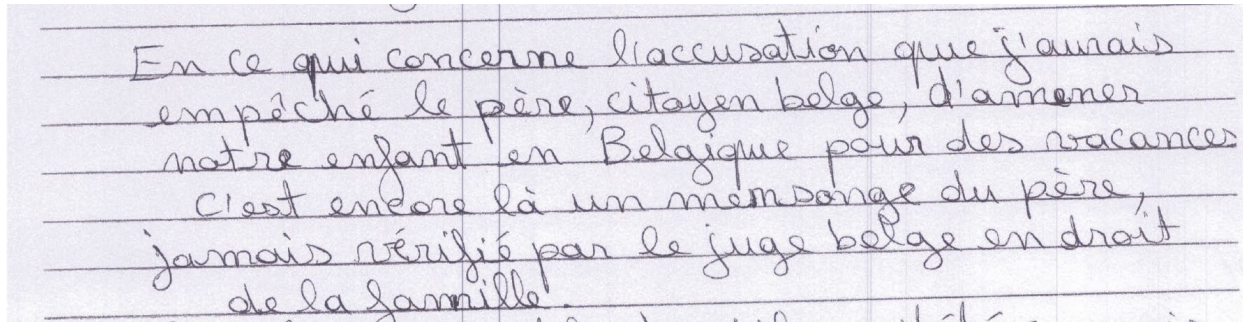
Je n'ai pas eu à enlever ma fille pour la protéger.  
Je n'ai jamais commis d'acte d'enlèvement, ni en Belgique, ni ailleurs.

### **Rokia's Appeal**

In her letter from prison, Rokia declares unequivocally: "I did not have to kidnap my daughter to protect her. I have never committed an act of abduction, neither in Belgium nor elsewhere. As a mother, I have the duty to protect my children from the negative consequences of life experiences."

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En ce qui concerne l'accusation que j'aurais empêché le père, citoyen belge, d'amener notre enfant en Belgique pour des vacances c'est encore là un mensonge du père, jamais vérifié par le juge belge en droit de la famille!

*I had to protect my children while waiting for a procedure that would safeguard my daughter. This procedure is ongoing in Mali. A first judgment in 2019 by the Bamako court granted me custody of the child. Investigations were conducted.*

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### **Call to Action**

We urge the Belgian courts to respect international laws and human rights by focusing on their jurisdiction and releasing themselves from this case. It is imperative that the principles of justice, fairness, and respect for international boundaries be upheld to prevent further harm to Rokia and her children. Too often, European laws are applied with complete disregard for the other party when that party is African, and especially when the party is a woman. Her voice is ignored, mocked, and she is often treated as a menace to society for merely loving her children and wanting to protect them.

Je pensais avoir compris que, l'ambition de la déclaration universelle des droits humains est de préserver des valeurs humaines communes à toutes les nations du monde, à travers des règles juridiques précises et leur application sans partie pris.

As Rokia poignantly states, "This violent judicial pursuit against me would not have existed if I were a French woman of American citizenship living in New York with her two binational children, legally, with a New York family court decision granting custody, pursued by Belgian justice based on a completely false case."

Rokia's words remind us of the fundamental mission of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "I thought I understood that the ambition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is to preserve common human values to all nations of the world through precise legal rules and their impartial application."

Cette poursuite judiciaire violente, ~~à mon~~  
encontre n'aurait pas existé si j'étais une  
Française de citoyenneté d'origine américaine  
vivant à New York avec ses deux enfants  
binationalise en toute légalité, avec une  
décision du tribunal en droit de la famille  
de New York lui donnant la garde de l'enfant  
dont la garde est réclamée auprès de  
la justice belge, par un citoyen belge, sur  
base d'un dossier totalement mensonger.  
~~Un dossier dans~~

Rokia Traoré

## Why This Case Matters

Rokia Traoré's case highlights the significant lack of cohesion in family law practices across different jurisdictions. Key points include:

- **Jurisdictional Overreach:** The Belgian court's involvement in the custody battle is questionable, given that neither the father, mother, nor child lived in Belgium at the time the father filed suit in 2019, and the child has been living and attending school in Mali with her mother since 2016.
- **Failure to Recognize Local Jurisdiction:** The Malian court granted Rokia full custody and allowed supervised visitation rights to the father, yet this decision has been disregarded by Belgian authorities, and the father continues to claim that he was denied the opportunity to see his child.
- **Post-Separation Violence:** The ongoing control and coercion exerted by partners even after separation using a biased legal system with complete disregard for international laws.

## Call to Action

International attention to Rokia Traoré's situation is crucial. It can help ensure she receives a fair trial and amplify the voices of many other women and children in similar situations. We urge journalists to highlight this case to advocate for justice and systemic change.

To support Rokia Traoré and her children during this difficult time, the Free Rokia Traoré Committee is calling for urgent mobilization. We urgently request that European courts, particularly the Belgian courts, take the following actions:

- **Immediate release of Rokia Traoré** so she can return to her children and resume her work. It is crucial to respect her fundamental right to freedom, family life, and her career as an artist.
- **Sanctions against the Belgian courts** for their complete disregard of international laws and human rights. The prolonged and unjust handling of this case, as well as the arbitrary incarceration of Rokia Traoré, must be condemned.
- **Definitive closure of this case**, recognizing and respecting the decisions made by the Malian judiciary. The Bamako court granted full custody of the child to Rokia

Traoré, with supervised visitation rights for the father, and this decision must be enforced.

The Free Rokia Traoré Committee has established a support platform to amplify Rokia's voice and seek justice. You can get involved by:

- **Sharing Rokia Traoré's letter** through your networks and helping us raise awareness on social media about this case using the hashtag #FreeRokiaTraoré.
- **Signing the petition** in support of her cause via the link <http://openpetition.eu!/vdxfy>
- **Contributing to legal fees** for Rokia Traoré's freedom: [GoFundMe Link](#).

Your support is crucial to ending this injustice and helping Rokia regain her freedom and reunite with her children. Together, we can make a difference.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We are available for further discussions and can provide additional information or arrange interviews with advocates and legal experts involved in the Free Rokia Traoré Movement.

Contact: Free Rokia Traoré Committee – [Justice4Rokia@bruxxel.org](mailto:Justice4Rokia@bruxxel.org)