

National Conference of Black Lawyers
December 2011 Political Prisoners Calendar

Ella Joe Baker was born on **December 13, 1903** in Norfolk, Virginia. Her commitment to racial justice was born in her growing up in North Carolina and listening to her grandmother's stories about slave revolts. This commitment was to become her life work. Ms. Baker worked as Field Secretary for the NAACP from 1943 to 1946. Inspired by the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, she co-founded "In Friendship" to raise money to end Jim Crow Laws in the deep south. In 1957 Ms. Baker moved to Atlanta, Georgia to help organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). She also ran a voter registration campaign called Crusade for Citizenship.

Ever the activist, Ella Baker assisted in organizing students from North Carolina A&T University during their sit-ins at lunch counters. Ms. Baker viewed young emerging activists as a resource and asset to the movement. She was an organizer and leader of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that became one of the foremost advocates for human rights. Her commitment to racial justice and to young people wanting to be involved is reflected in the African name was given, "Fundi," a Swahili word meaning a person who teaches a craft to the next generation. Ms. Baker was a respected and influential leader in the fight for human and civil rights until her death on her 83rd birthday, December 13, 1986.

Zolo Agona Azania was born **December 12, 1954** in Gary, Indiana. He grew up in extreme poverty and was a well known activist in Gary. An artist and writer, he was involved in the campaign to make Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday and designed a button used by campaigners in Gary. Zolo worked hard in school receiving a scholarship to Purdue University. He did not attend Purdue, however, because he was arrested in 1980 for a bank robbery in Gary during which a police officer was fatally shot. Mr. Azania steadfastly maintains he was not involved in these crimes.

There was purportedly prosecutorial misconduct during Zolo's trial. It is reported that the prosecution intimidated witnesses and suppressed exculpatory evidence. Zolo's commitment to racial justice was evidently used against him. Two other men charged and convicted with Zolo received 60 years, while Zolo received the death penalty for a crime. On October 17, 2008, after several legal battles, the State of Indiana abandoned its 27 year campaign to execute Mr. Azania. Mr. Azania's incarceration with the threat of death at the hands of the State of Indiana violates human rights conventions, among them, Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

The National Conference of Black Lawyers calls for the release of all political prisoners in the United States.