

# **Another stain on Canada's reputation**

## **Canada has a duty to bring Abousfian Abdelrazik home, for his sake and for the sake of our integrity**

By Maher Arar, The Ottawa Citizen Special April 2, 2009

The handling of the case of Abousfian Abdelrazik is shameful, to say the least. And this shamefulness increases with each new revelation of how the government has been putting up obstacles to ensure he never comes back home.

Abdelrazik is a Sudanese-born Canadian citizen who, when travelling to Sudan in 2002 to visit his sick mother, was arrested by Sudanese authorities based on a request from CSIS, Canada's spy agency. He has since been imprisoned on two occasions in Sudan, and has described harrowing episodes of torture.

Although he has been publicly cleared by the RCMP, CSIS, and the Sudanese secret service of any terrorism-related suspicions, he has been unable to return to Canada due to an unwillingness on the part of Canadian officials to renew his passport or to issue him an emergency travel document.

Recognizing the danger and hardship he faces, the Canadian government has actually allowed him to take refuge in the Canadian embassy in Sudan for close to one year, where he lives in the front lobby of the consulate. But, despite clear admissions from CSIS and the RCMP that he represents no threat and has in fact done nothing wrong, our government has methodically placed hurdle after hurdle in front of him, obstacles of all kinds to prevent him from coming back to his family in Canada.

Essentially, he is a citizen in exile, albeit unofficially.

Since the events of 9/11, it has become obvious that Canada and its security agencies have been willing to "shake hands with the devil" when it comes to national security, under the belief that such co-operation would eliminate the threat of terrorism and create stability. But here we are, eight years later, and stability remains elusive.

The main difference between then and now is that our hands and reputation have become progressively more stained. Many of our excessive counter-terrorism practices have clearly violated basic human rights, and some have actually destroyed lives, creating more instability and, with it, less trust in our national security organizations. These practices have alienated not only Muslims, but members of society as a whole, and not just in Canada, but also all over the world.

How is it that a Canadian citizen such as Abdelrazik can be blocked from returning to Canada? We learned through the O'Connor and the Iacobucci inquiries that some

elements within our security apparatus have actively preferred to keep those that they consider "undesirables" in foreign dungeons, against all clearly stated Canadian policy. Why, then, in the case of Abdelrazik, is our government falling into the same trap? Why do we not learn from our past mistakes?

Whether Abdelrazik is considered to be "undesirable" or not, isn't the question to be asking in the first place. The fact remains that he is a Canadian citizen, and has a right to return here to be reunited with his family. Our government has an obligation to protect and support his rights by doing its best to bring him back home, particularly when he remains in a country where his wellbeing is very much at risk.

We have been told time and time again both by our government and by other western governments that terrorism is the greatest threat we face. There is no doubt that terrorism is a threat to our safety and as such must be eradicated. But how are we to be protected from the erosion of both due process and our rights as citizens? Are these not also profound threats to our safety, to our freedom and to our national security?

It is time for the government to remove the hurdles it has placed to impede Abdelrazik's return home. Not just for his sake, but for the sake of Canada's integrity. The government must realize that it is no longer about who it believes Abdelrazik is or is not, as an individual, but rather about who we are and who we are not, as Canadians.

Maher Arar is a telecommunications engineer who was detained by the U.S. government and sent to Syria to be interrogated and tortured. The government of Canada then ordered a Royal Commission of Inquiry that publicly cleared him of any links to terrorism.



**Abousfian Abdelrazik's step-daughter Wafa Shanine and son Kouteyba are among family members who are waiting for his return to Canada.**

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