

THE CASE OF ABOUSFIAN ABDELRAZIK

Canadian stranded in Sudan one step closer to home

ANDRÉ PICARD – Globe and Mail

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A Canadian man marooned at the country's embassy in Sudan for almost a year received a plane ticket home on the weekend and is now only a signature away from freedom.

But securing that signature on travel documents, usually a routine matter, could prove complex for Abousfian Abdelrazik, his lawyer cautioned.

"He has presented the plane ticket to authorities. He has asked to receive travel documents and he should get a response on Monday," Yavar Hameed said in an interview yesterday.

But, in the next breath, he added: "But there has been a lot of prevarication in this case."

Mr. Abdelrazik, 47, is trapped in legal limbo.

Back in 2003, the Montreal resident was identified as an al-Qaeda operative and arrested in Sudan while visiting his sick mother.

Canadian and Sudanese authorities have cleared him of being a terrorist suspect after years of questioning, imprisonment and torture, but he remains on the United Nations terror list at the behest of the United States.

The Canadian government gave Mr. Abdelrazik "temporary safe haven" at the embassy in Khartoum nearly a year ago, and he has been living there ever since.

The federal government has imposed increasingly difficult conditions on the return of Mr. Abdelrazik, at first saying he would need only a confirmed airline reservation and later a paid-for ticket before he would get the temporary passport.

André Lemay, a spokesman for Foreign Affairs, said yesterday that Canada has a "binding legal obligation" to respect the UN terror list, but is providing Mr. Abdelrazik with consular assistance.

Mr. Lemay said he could not comment on specifics related to the plane ticket or the travel documents because "this matter is currently under litigation."

Mr. Hameed, the Ottawa-based lawyer for Mr. Abdelrazik, said even if Canada respects the UN list, there is a clear exception that allows a person on the list to return to his home country, and that clause should be invoked.

"The UN travel ban is a preposterous excuse," he said.

Mr. Abdelrazik's ordeal has left him destitute but about 100 supporters in Canada chipped in to purchase an airline ticket. The \$997 ticket, which will take him from Khartoum to Toronto via Abu Dhabi, is for April 3, but only if he has travel documents.

The plane ticket, which was delivered to Mr. Abdelrazik on Saturday, was purchased despite the fact that benefactors could be charged for violating Canadian anti-terrorism laws, which make it a crime to offer help to anyone on the UN terror watch list.