

Canadians defy law in bid to bring home one of their own

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Globe and Mail

2009.03.13

More than 100 supporters chip in for airfare for Canadian exiled in Sudan

MONTREAL and OTTAWA -- More than 100 Canadians have chipped in airfare and exposed themselves to criminal prosecution in an effort to force Ottawa to allow a Canadian citizen to fly home from Sudan, where he's been stranded since being labelled an al-Qaeda operative by the United Nations.

The donors, including teachers, students and a couple of dozen university professors from across Canada, bought a \$997 airline ticket for Abousfian Abdelrazik.

Now, they say, it's up to the Harper government to live up to a promise to give him travel documents for his April 3 flight from Khartoum to Toronto via Abu Dhabi.

Mr. Abdelrazik, 47, is lost in a legal no-man's land. Canadian and Sudanese authorities have cleared him of being a terrorist suspect after years of questioning, imprisonment and torture.

But he remains on the UN terror list at the behest of the United States, according to his lawyer.

The Canadian government gave Mr. Abdelrazik "temporary safe haven" at the Khartoum embassy nearly a year ago.

Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Emma Welford would not say whether emergency travel documents will be issued, as promised, saying only that Canada is obliged to enforce a United Nations travel ban on Mr. Abdelrazik.

But that travel ban specifically permits citizens to return to their home countries.

Ms. Welford declined to comment on that section.

The Harper 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.

At the same time, the government has warned it could charge anyone who helps the destitute man obtain airfare.

Mr. Abdelrazik's benefactors went ahead anyway. Assembled through word of mouth and Facebook, they are flouting a sweeping federal anti-terrorism law banning Canadians from offering financial help to anyone on the UN terror watch list.

If prosecuted, the donors could face up to 10 years in prison.

"I'm taking it seriously, I'm definitely afraid," said Cory Legassic, a Montreal school teacher who gave \$20.

"I admit I'm a coward, I don't know if I would do this alone. But if I'm going to jail, there's 115 of us ... it's going to get very messy."

Ms. Welford said proper authorities would decide if the law has been broken.

Former Iraq hostages James Loney and Harmeet Singh Sooden and former Liberal solicitor-general Warren Allmand are among the donors. Saskatchewan farmer David Orchard, who has dabbled in Progressive Conservative and Liberal leadership politics, gave \$400.

Mr. Abdelrazik, a former Montreal resident with three children and an ex-wife living in Canada, was arrested in Sudan in 2003 when he was visiting his sick mother.

Documents show both CSIS and the RCMP have informed Foreign Affairs there is no evidence Mr. Abdelrazik belongs on the UN list. Meanwhile, a routine CSIS summary continues to allege that he was trained in Afghanistan and "is an important Islamic Jihad activist."

Sudanese officials have declared him innocent.

NDP MP Paul Dewar, who has been raising Mr. Abdelrazik's case in the House of Commons, says the government also needs to be more forthcoming about CSIS's role in Mr. Abdelrazik's detention in Sudan.

Government documents have suggested Mr. Abdelrazik was arrested in Sudan at the behest of CSIS, Canada's anti-terrorism agency.

Mr. Dewar says that raises questions as to whether this is a case of Canada participating in a CIA-style rendition along the lines of Canadian Maher Arar, who was detained and tortured in a Syrian prison.

Mr. Abdelrazik's Canadian lawyer, Yavar Hameed, says the answer is clear.

"This is a case of extraordinary rendition," he said. "We had Maher Arar, and now this."