

## Citizen in limbo

February 24, 2009

Canada should release Abousfian Abdelrazik from his bureaucratic hell in Sudan and let him come back to this country.

He is a citizen, if not an ideal one, and should not be treated as someone to be stranded forever at a distant embassy.

One need not hold a brief for Mr. Abdelrazik (about whom Canadians know little) to question this country's treatment of him. It was Canada, it appears, that asked Sudan to arrest Mr. Abdelrazik when he turned up in that country in 2003. Sudan did so, twice, and held him for 19 months in total. Canada, in ordinary circumstances, would have no obligation to facilitate the return of someone who left voluntarily. But neither does it have the right to block his return. This is what it has done, and continues to do, first by refusing to grant him an emergency passport, and then by reportedly threatening to lay a charge of financial terrorism against anyone who pays for his return flight.

(No doubt that would be an interesting prosecution, the state vs. a liberal filmmaker or civil liberties group that has chosen to pay for Mr. Abdelrazik's flight.)

These are not ordinary circumstances, in any event. It has echoes of the Iacobucci inquiry into the jailing and torture in Syria of three Syrian-Canadian terror suspects; former Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci found Canada had played a disconcerting role in that affair. Mr. Abdelrazik's case has similarities, at least on the surface. Sudan is a state that uses torture on prisoners, according to the U.S. State Department.

There is no doubt that Canada is fighting an implacable enemy. An al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group is believed to have abducted two Canadian diplomats in Niger, and taken them to Mali. The two were on a secret UN mission, and Canadians fear for them and expect their government to move heaven and earth to try to save them. But none of that justifies Canada's treatment of Mr. Abdelrazik.

If Washington is right that the Sudanese-born Mr. Abdelrazik is an al-Qaeda operative, Canada could charge him under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2001. It has had plenty of time to investigate charges. But perhaps Washington is wrong, and Canada merely wishes to placate its neighbour. The RCMP says it reviewed its files and "was unable to locate any current and substantive information that indicates Mr. Abdelrazik is involved in criminal activity." Canada has actually asked that Mr. Abdelrazik be taken off the United Nations' no-fly list.

At a time when President Barack Obama is standing up for the rule of law, and rolling back Bush-era policies in the fight against terrorism, it seems strange that Ottawa is inventing bureaucratic stratagems to keep a citizen it doesn't believe dangerous far from home.