

The lesson on Abousfian Abdelrazik: Get on a list, any list, and Ottawa washes its hands

Posted: May 08, 2009, 9:30 AM by NP Editor

From Question Period, House of Commons, Thursday

Hon. Bob Rae: I would like to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs a question. Now that official for the United Nations who is responsible for the travel ban list has stated very clearly that in his opinion, there is no barrier to Mr. Abdelrazik's coming back to Canada, in light of the fact that he is on the United Nations list and that this is seen to be such a major aspect of the government's case in court with respect to Mr. Abdelrazik's situation, I wonder if the minister could now explain to us, what is the problem that the government has with allowing this Canadian citizen to come home?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the case of Mr. Abdelrazik, he does remain on the 1267 United Nations List of al-Qaeda and Taliban suspected terrorists.

This individual is therefore on this list and this issue is now before the court. I will therefore refrain from making any additional comments on that issue.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the government said and the minister signed letters saying that he is not on an RCMP list; he is not on a CSIS list. Then the government said that he should get a passport and agreed to give him a passport. Then it pulled back from giving him the passport. Then it said he should get a ticket, and hundreds of people have been prepared to give him a ticket. He is not on anyone's list except for this travel list. Now the UN official said, "Whether it is Abdelrazik or anybody else, it is up to the state in question", that is to say, Canada, "whether they want to allow the person to come back or not". The minister can no longer hide. There are no second class citizens in this country. Why is he not taking appropriate--

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs. Order, please.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, this does not change anything. The Government of Canada takes its international obligations very seriously. In that regard I reiterate, he is still on the 1267 list and, as I mentioned before, this case is before the court and I will not make any more comments on this issue.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a bogus argument to suggest that Mr. Abdelrazik is on a list and that somehow prevents him from being brought back to Canada. That has been made very, very clear by the United Nations official, Richard Barrett, who is in charge of the whole program. Why is the Conservative government pursuing an argument that the UN Security Council says is wrong? Either it does not understand its rights and obligations under international law, or worse, it is deliberately misleading this House and the court at the same time. When will it stop and bring him home?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, it does not make any difference what the leader of the NDP says in this House and whether he casts aspersions on myself and the government. What I am saying to him quite clearly is this individual is still on the 1267 list that has been put together and that reunites people who are identified with al-Qaeda and who are identified with the Taliban. It is in front of the courts and that is where this litigation is going to be handled.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, every document that has come to light, every report that has been done, all the information that becomes available, whether from the RCMP, from CSIS, from the United Nations, all clear Abdelrazik and they show how much contempt the government has for basic human rights of Canadian citizens. If the government thinks he has done anything wrong, there is something it can do about it. Bring him back, lay charges and put him on trial, but it will not do that. So much longer is the government going to leave this man on a cot in a Canadian embassy in the Sudan? How long are we going to leave him there?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the colleague that we take our responsibility in terms of safety and security, in terms of our international obligations very seriously. In that regard, we will assume our responsibilities. The case is now being pleaded in front of the courts and we will wait for a decision on that.

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