

EXILED IN KHARTOUM

'I just sit there. Nobody talks to me'

Abdelrazik laments circumscribed life at embassy, but also fears being driven out

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Special to The Globe and Mail

March 13, 2009

KHARTOUM -- Late at night, from the quiet guardhouse at the Canadian embassy in Sudan's dusty capital, Khartoum, Abousfian Abdelrazik makes a call. He asks if the person on the line will be coming to see him. He sounds desperate.

More than 10 months into his unusual stay at the high-walled embassy, Mr. Abdelrazik's contact with the outside world has been reduced to small talk with embassy staff and strangers in the waiting room and increasingly occasional visits from some members of his extended family still living in Sudan.

The phone call to this Canadian journalist in Khartoum is short. Mr. Abdelrazik is told the previously planned visit will have to be cancelled. He sounds disappointed. Few people have shown interest in his life; he has few threads left to hang on to.

"I'm alone," he says over a crackly telephone. "I just sit there. Nobody talks to me."

After 4 p.m., he says, when staff go home for the day, only he and the guards remain inside the razor-wired concrete embassy walls. The boredom and loneliness are overwhelming. "For me, it's just hopeless. I don't see no light nowhere. For me, it's very dark now."

He says the days go by slowly. "I just watch TV and exercise sometimes. If I sit down just to think about my problems, [I feel like] my head is going to blow off."

If guests come to use the pool, Mr. Abdelrazik is asked to leave the area. If the embassy has any kind of party, he is not included. He says he feels ignored and not in control of his own life. "It's a matter of dignity ... I live in humiliation ... They treat me like a dog."

He worries that if he leaves the embassy, Canadian officials won't let him back in, or he'll be rearrested by Sudanese authorities. He says he feels abandoned by his Canadian government.

A practising Muslim, Mr. Abdelrazik wears a traditional white robe and *kufi* cap.

His beard has grown long, black at the roots but white everywhere else. He believes that the government's refusal to bring him home is linked to his black skin and Muslim faith.

And he believes his perceived negative treatment - which he calls "indescribable" - is part of a wider plot to drive him out of the embassy for good.

"[The Canadian] government looks very bad in front of the Canadian public with my story. If I go out of here, they get rid of me and that's it."