

Ottawa balks at travel permit for man trapped in Sudan

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Abousfian Abdelrazik missed the flight that would have delivered him yesterday from a long exile in Sudan because Foreign Affairs officials failed to make good on their long-standing commitment to issue him an emergency passport if he could find an airline willing to carry him in defiance of the U.S. terrorism no-fly list.

"In light of the complex issues ... it was clear that these matters could not be resolved in time for your client's travel which you scheduled on Sept. 15," Anne Turley, a government lawyer, said less than 24 hours before Mr. Abdelrazik's scheduled flight home on Etihad Airway was due to depart Khartoum yesterday for Toronto via Abu Dhabi.

"They are trying to find reasons not to bring him back, instead of finding a way to get him home," Yavar Hameed, the lawyer for Mr. Abdelrazik said yesterday.

The government had nearly three weeks to issue the emergency travel documents and had previously promised it would do so if Mr. Abdelrazik - a Canadian citizen - managed to find an airline willing to ignore the Bush administration's "no-fly" blacklist. Ms. Turley suggested yesterday that the federal election was interfering with the process.

She told a case conference chaired by Allan Lutfy, Chief Justice of the Federal Court, that she was having trouble getting instructions on what to do about Mr. Abdelrazik because of the federal election, according to several people briefed on the meeting.

But the Etihad flight home was confirmed Aug. 26, long before the election was called. And Foreign Minister David Emerson isn't running for re-election.

Deliberations on whether to give Mr. Abdelrazik a diplomatic escort and emergency passport "continues to be under active consideration," Ms. Turley said in her Sept. 14 letter that scrapped hopes he would be coming home by today, more than six years after he left Montreal in 2002 to visit his ailing mother in Khartoum.

Although the government of Stephen Harper says it wants Mr. Abdelrazik removed from the UN Security Council's blacklist of accused al-Qaeda operatives and says it doesn't know why the Bush administration suspects him of being a terrorist, it has also refused

to renew his passport and secret Canadian documents show that it was Ottawa that asked Sudan to hold him in prison.

As recently as April, senior Foreign Affairs officials said, in writing, "we stand by the commitment," to "ensure that he has an emergency travel document to facilitate his return to Canada."

In an April 18 letter, Sean Robertson, director of consular affairs in the Department of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that Mr. Abdelrazik, like all Canadian citizens, is entitled to emergency travel documents to get him home.

In a sworn affidavit, filed last week in Federal Court, Mr. Robertson says Canada was kept in the dark by the Bush administration when it blacklisted Mr. Abdelrazik as a suspected al-Qaeda operative.

That statement suggests the Bush administration flouted UN Security Council guidelines that call for the blacklisting state to seek information from the state of citizenship.

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