

Pressure mounts to repatriate Canadian citizen

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Human-rights groups and opposition MPs demanded yesterday that the Harper government repatriate Abofian Abdelrazik, the Canadian labelled an al-Qaeda threat but now sheltered in the "temporary safe haven" of the Canadian embassy in Khartoum.

Bring him home and charge him in Canada if he is a terrorist, the Harper government was told.

"Get him out of there and bring him home now," said the NDP's foreign affairs critic, Paul Dewar.

"If there are allegations against Mr. Abdelrazik, charges should be laid and he should be tried in Canada," said Ihsaan Gardee, a spokesman for the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Roch Tassé, co-ordinator of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, which represents more than a dozen rights groups across Canada, said Mr. Abdelrazik's plight – left in a foreign prison and then involuntary exile for nearly five years by successive Canadian governments that denied him a passport – echoes that of Maher Arar, the Canadian falsely fingered by the RCMP as a terrorism suspect and later shipped by the United States to Syria where he was tortured in prison.

"Mr. Abdelrazik's case brings to mind the Arar inquiry, and the current Iacobucci inquiry, which is examining the involvement of Canadian officials in the overseas detention and torture of Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad El Maati and Muayyed Nureddin," he said.

Mr. Abdelrazik also claims to have been beaten and abused while in prison in Sudan, an incarceration that secret Canadian documents obtained by The Globe and Mail acknowledge was "at our request."

Mr. Abdelrazik, 46, "has a right to travel back to Canada, his country of nationality," said John Tackaberry, spokesman for Amnesty International Canada.

"There are worrying indications that Canadian officials have played a role in the fate that has befallen him, including his arrest, detention, interrogation, listing and effective exile," he added.

Meanwhile, Mr. Abdelrazik was spending his fourth night in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, facing what may be a long wait while the Harper government seeks to have him taken off the UN Security Council list of al-Qaeda members.

Sean Robertson, a senior foreign affairs official, wrote formally to Mr. Abdelrazik's lawyers last month assuring them that the government of Canada had already "transmitted our support for Mr. Abdelrazik's de-listing request to the 1267 Committee," a reference to the Security Council resolution bearing that number that blacklists known al-Qaeda members.

But the government is refusing to provide Mr. Abdelrazik or his lawyers with evidence of that support and yesterday it refused to make it public.

"Officials now are making up for what I would suggest is the incompetence of [Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier.] Because they're scrambling to do what he had not initiated, and that is to get Mr. Abdelrazik off the UN list," Mr. Dewar said.

Mr. Abdelrazik has repeatedly denied he has any connection to al-Qaeda or has ever been to Afghanistan, and said he just wants to return to Canada and be reunited with the children he hasn't seen in nearly five years.

Mr. Bernier told the House of Commons this week that Mr. Abdelrazik was being well cared for in the Canadian embassy but his lawyer yesterday said, "Canada's treatment of Mr. Abdelrazik is cruel and extraordinary and is causing him extreme mental suffering."

Yavar Hameed, his Ottawa-based lawyer, said Canadian diplomats in Khartoum were deliberately trying to starve Mr. Abdelrazik into leaving the embassy, only days after he was given refuge.

"Over the weekend, consular staff has stated he will not be fed three meals daily. Consular staff has also stressed that Mr. Abdelrazik's personal amenities are capped at \$100 monthly, possibly not enough to go on feeding him throughout May. It appears the Harper government is trying to starve Mr. Abdelrazik out of the embassy," Mr. Hameed said yesterday in a statement.

He also said that Mr. Abdelrazik had been cut off from all information about the furor surrounding his case in Canada, denied access to newspapers, refused contact with Sudanese and Canadian news media and that his telephone calls to his lawyers were now being routed through the Foreign Affairs switchboard in Ottawa where they could be monitored.

"The commitment of Mr. Bernier to provide humanitarian aid and communication with his lawyer is being flagrantly violated," Mr. Hameed said.

Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae said, "if the Canadian government is taking the position that he's not a security risk, then they should get him home." He cannot be left at the embassy in Khartoum while Canada tries to have him removed from a UN no-fly list, Mr. Rae said. "It could be a very lengthy process."

Mr. Dewar said no-fly lists were often unreliable, pointing out that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was embarrassed this week when she was forced to admit that former South African president Nelson Mandela still appears on a U.S. watch list and cannot fly to the United States without special dispensation.