

Stop stalling over repatriation, Emerson told

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Neither the United Nations nor the United States is blocking the return home of Aousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen, so Foreign Minister David Emerson should stop stalling and repatriate him, Dawn Black, the NDP's defence critic said Monday.

"He's marooned, he's never charged with any crime and now his own government fails to assist him," Ms. Black said in an interview. "I think that's wrong."

Senior government officials - in documents marked "secret" and "Canadian eyes only" - warned the Harper government against allowing Mr. Abdelrazik to come home to Canada because doing so might upset the Bush administration.

But U.S. ambassador to Canada David Wilkins suggested this weekend that repatriating Mr. Abdelrazik, who has been granted temporary safe haven and is living inside the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, wouldn't upset Washington. "The Americans have been clear that they see no problem with his return," Ms. Black said. In light of the government's very "tarnished record of how they dealt with Maher Arar" - who was also labelled as an Islamic extremist by Canadian security agents - "one questions what Minister Emerson and the Conservatives are doing on this file," Ms. Black said.

Anne Howland, a spokeswoman for the minister, said Mr. Emerson could not comment about the case because Mr. Abdelrazik is suing the government to force his repatriation.

His predecessor, Maxime Bernier, told Parliament that it was the UN Security Council travel ban that precluded Mr. Abdelrazik's return. But the so-called UN 1267 blacklist of al-Qaeda suspects specifically allows for a travel-ban exemption for citizens to return home.

There are numerous documented cases of people on the UN 1267 list returning home. For instance, Abdelghani Mzoudi, a Moroccan once accused of involvement in the Sept 11, 2001, attacks, was acquitted by a German court. Although he remains on the 1267 list, he flew to Morocco on a commercial airline in 2005.

Similarly, there are instances of Canadians on the U.S. no-fly list - notably Mr. Arar - who are now able to fly domestically and internationally after the intervention of Canadian government officials.

The Harper government apparently no longer considered Mr. Abdelrazik a security risk. Not only did Mr. Bernier grant him "temporary safe haven" in the embassy, but last

December it advocated to the UN Security Council 1267 committee that he be delisted. In February, senior Foreign Affairs officials suggested a travel ban exemption could be requested to permit Mr. Abdelrazik to return home.

"This would require ministerial decision," the memo, dated Feb. 28, says. It is marked "secret." No ministerial decision has apparently been made.

But the assessment by Foreign Affairs that Mr. Abdelrazik should be delisted isn't shared by some intelligence operatives.

Two senior government officials - Isabelle Desmartis, director of intelligence for Transport Canada and Debra Normoyle, director-general for security and emergency preparedness at Transport Canada, labelled Mr. Abdelrazik an "Islamic extremist" in documents marked "secret" and dated April 30, 2008. That's the same label Canadian intelligence agents applied to Mr. Arar before his arrest in New York and torture in Syria.

In the Abdelrazik file, the documents warned that "senior government of Canada officials should be mindful of the potential reaction of our U.S. counterparts to Abdelrazik's return to Canada as he is on the U.S. no-fly list."

Mr. Abdelrazik, a Montreal resident who was granted refugee status in Canada in 1990 and became a citizen in 1995, was imprisoned in Sudan while visiting his ailing mother in 2003. Mr. Abdelrazik was jailed in Sudan's notorious Kober prison, where he says he was beaten and tortured.

Previously obtained documents, marked "CSIS" - a reference to Canada's Security and Intelligence Service - say he was imprisoned "at our request," meaning at Canada's request. He was released in July, 2005, after the second of two prison stints. Both Air Canada and Lufthansa refused to honour his ticket home to Montreal. By then he was on Washington's no-fly list. He wasn't added to the UN list until a year later.