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Top union joins Abousfian Abdelrazik's struggle

By Gloria Galloway
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Canadian Labour Congress pushes Ottawa to help get Sudanese-Canadian off UN watch list - and offers him a job, risking prosecution

The Canadian Labour Congress says the federal government must be more vigorous in its efforts to get Abousfian Abdelrazik removed from a UN terrorism watch list that prevents him from holding a job or a bank account.

Mr. Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen who was trapped in Sudan for six years after the United States wrongly declared he had ties to al-Qaeda, has not been permitted to work since the Canadian government allowed him to return to this country in June of last year.

He is one of two Canadians on the so-called 1267 list compiled by the United Nations. The other is Ahmed Said Khadr, the patriarch of the Khadr family who died in 2003 in an Afghanistan gunfight.

The UN law, which was established in 1999 after U.S. embassies were bombed in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, makes it illegal to give material aid or a financial services to those who have been listed. They cannot fly and their assets must be frozen. And any person or organization that hires them could be prosecuted.

The Canadian government, which only reluctantly issued the travel documents that permitted Mr. Abdelrazik to return home after he was cleared by both CSIS and the RCMP, has requested that he be removed from the list. But the UN Security Council has refused, offering no reasons for the decision.

So the Canadian Labour Congress wants the government to actively lobby the international body to change the ruling. "This is a fundamental issue of justice in terms of his name being on there and being denied the basic freedoms all Canadians enjoy, to work and to live, in dignity and in their community" Hassan Yussuff, secretary-treasurer of the CLC, told a news conference on Tuesday.

"We've seen this situation far too often, whether it's a Muslim Canadian or a person of color, that the government has been lax in its passionate commitment to move vigorously," Mr. Yussuff said. The government, he added, is not moving with any haste on this file.

The union has agreed to employ Mr. Abdelrazik for a week, risking charges under the UN law. Two affiliated unions have agreed to follow suit and the CLC hopes other labour groups will do the same "to send a very clear message to our Canadian government that this is a basic issue of human rights."

Mr. Abdelrazik thanked the CLC for its efforts on his behalf. "Physically I came to Canada but I am still in prison," he told the news conference. "The Canadian government blocked my way to come back. And when I came back I asked them to lobby on my half for delisting because it is impossible for individuals to do so and they refused."

Mr. Abdelrazik said he has not applied for jobs since his return from Sudan because he fears that consequences would be brought to bear on his employers. He is entitled to a survivor's pension but a chartered bank in Canada refused to allow him to open an account.

When he successfully opened an account at a credit union, it was frozen a month later. The UN has since provided him with an exemption that would allow him to hold an account but the credit union has yet to release his funds.

Mr. Abdelrazik returned to Sudan in 2003 to visit his sick mother and was arrested a short time later. He was released in 2004 but, when he was allowed to fly back to Canada in 2006, his passport had expired and the Canadian government refused to provide him with new travel documents.

It did so last year but only after the Federal Court ruled that Mr. Abdelrazik's rights had been violated and ordered the government to facilitate his return.

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