

Abousfian Abdelrazik back in Canada after six years in exile in Sudan

Diana Mehta, THE CANADIAN PRESS
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MISSISSAUGA, Ont. - A beaming Abousfian Abdelrazik pumped the air with his fist as he walked down the arrivals ramp into a crowd of cheering supporters Saturday afternoon at Pearson International Airport.

Following several failed attempts to return to Canada, Abdelrazik said he was very happy to be home after spending the past six years in exile in Sudan.

"Thank you very much, this is your work that I'm here right now," said Abdelrazik to a noisy crowd of about 40 supporters toting colourful welcome-home signs.

Abdelrazik, who has family in Montreal, was arrested but not charged during a 2003 visit to Sudan to see his ill mother. He said CSIS and American FBI officers interrogated him over alleged terrorist links. He also claimed he was tortured, but Canada said it knew nothing of the alleged abuse.

Sudanese authorities eventually released Abdelrazik, who denied involvement in extremism. The RCMP said there was no information linking him to criminal activities.

Abdelrazik said he was very grateful to all his supporters across the country .

"I'm very tired. I am very happy," he said. "I am proud to be a citizen of this famous nation."

A team of lawyers ushered Abdelrazik to a car waiting to drive him to Montreal, where he was to meet members of his family. A midnight rally was planned to celebrate his return.

Abdelrazik's lawyer, Yavar Hameed, who travelled to Khartoum to bring his client home, said it had been a long journey "fighting the bureaucratic machine."

"The spirit of law and human rights in this country has triumphed. Today is a day of victory," he said as he stood beside Abdelrazik at the airport.

Audrey Brousseau, another member of the legal team, said Abdelrazik would spend the next few weeks relaxing with his family and getting readjusted to life in Canada.

Brousseau said she couldn't talk about what lies ahead on the legal front but added that a regulation which has frozen Abdelrazik's financial assets will have to be dealt with.

Abdelrazik spent the past 14 months living on a cot in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum. Even though supporters chipped in to buy him a ticket home, his passport had expired and he could not leave Sudan without one.

In April, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon reneged on a promise to issue Abdelrazik an emergency passport if he could get a plane ticket.

A Federal Court judge ruled earlier this month that the government breached Abdelrazik's constitutional rights by refusing to give him an emergency passport and ordered him returned within 30 days.

Toronto resident Beth Guthrie was one of about 200 Canadians who contributed to Abdelrazik's ticket home.

"I wrote him a couple of letters when he was in the embassy but I don't think he could respond," said the 65-year-old who had no previous connection to Abdelrazik.

"I'm just really excited and really happy for Abousfian and his family," she said.

Human rights activist Gerry Caplan was among those who gathered at the airport and said he was "outraged" at the way Abdelrazik had been treated.

"I'm just appalled at what our government's done to this fellow," he said.

Given the six years he has spent in exile, Abdelrazik's state of mind is a matter of concern, said Caplan.

"He's gone through an extraordinary ordeal for the past six years. The way the government has played with him in the last 14 months must have shaken him up badly," he said.

A document recently posted on the UN Security Council terrorist blacklist website claimed Abdelrazik had been closely tied to senior al-Qaida leadership.

It alleged Abdelrazik had close ties to Osama bin Laden's former lieutenant, who recruited and ran al-Qaida's network of training camps in Afghanistan.

The document further asserted Abdelrazik trained at a paramilitary camp in Afghanistan with other al-Qaida operatives, and provided administrative and logistical support to the terrorist network.

None of the allegations are new. It was already known Abdelrazik was added to the UN list in summer 2006 after the United States branded him a supporter of al-Qaida - the Federal Court found no supporting evidence for this claim.

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