

Abdelrazik back in Montreal after six years

BY JAN RAVENSBERGEN, MONTREAL GAZETTE JUNE 28, 2009



Abofian Abdelrazik arrives at Pearson International Airport in Toronto.

Photograph by: Fred Thornhill/Reuters, National Post

MONTREAL — "An exhausted but joyful Abofian Abdelrazik had only a few words for a noisy, happy welcome-home crowd in Montreal just before one a.m. this morning.

"I am very happy to be here," he told more than 50 supporters, accompanied by a brass band.

After six years in exile, alleged torture at the hands of Sudanese authorities, several thwarted attempts to return and over a year stranded at the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, Abdelrazik was home.

His long-awaited return represents "a moment of hope," Imam Salam Elmanyawi had earlier told the crowd waiting at the corner of Émilie Gamelin Park, near the Berri-UQÀM metro station.

Quietly, off to one side, the Imam had earlier kneeled down on the pavement and written his own simple message on a colourful banner: "Welcome home."

"It took a very long time and we are very concerned for him, that he will be able to re-establish himself," the Imam added.

"We are thankful for the work of the judiciary. But it took a very long time."

Hours earlier, Abdelrazik raised his right arm and clenched his fist as he walked down the ramp outside

the international arrival gates at Toronto's Pearson international airport.

About 40 supporters carrying signs that read "We did it!" and "Oh Canada! Our home and Abdelrazik's" chanted "Welcome home," as he made his way towards them.

"I'm very glad to be here; I'm very tired," said Abdelrazik, 47, who has been labelled a terrorist by the United States. "Thank you so much for your support. Now I'm here," he said before being led to a vehicle waiting outside the airport to take him on the final leg of his journey - the six-hour drive to Montreal to see his family.

Abdelrazik was born in Sudan but fled the country in 1990. He received refugee status in Canada in 1992 and Canadian citizenship in 1995.

In 2003, Abdelrazik travelled back to the country to visit his ailing mother. He was repeatedly imprisoned by Sudanese authorities and tried to return to Canada several times but was denied a passport because he had been put on a United Nations no-fly list at the request of the United States.

Abdelrazik denies accusations that he is a terrorist and both CSIS and the RCMP have said publicly that they have no evidence of Abdelrazik's involvement in terrorist activities.

He admits to knowing the so-called Millennium bomber, Ahmed Ressam of Montreal. Abdelrazik testified against Ressam at his trial.

In a June 4 ruling, a Federal Court judge ordered Abdelrazik's return, saying the Canadian government had breached his rights as a citizen to return to Canada.

"The power of the Canadian constitution and the rule of law obliged this government to allow Mr. Abdelrazik to come back," said his lawyer, Yavar Hameed. The law has triumphed over "reactionary politics and the egregious selective practice of citizenship," he added.

Ishann Gardee, executive director for the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations, said that while this is a victory for Abdelrazik, his trouble might not be over.

As he is still on the UN's no-fly list, his assets and funds are frozen and anyone who assists him is liable to be charged.