Abdelrazik 'glad to be a citizen of this famous nation'

After six years in legal limbo, he arrives from Sudan to supporters' cheers and tears

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ETIHAD AIRWAYS FLIGHT 141 – His name is on the no-fly list, but yesterday he was flying high above rippled clouds blanketing the world below on his way home to see his family for the first time in six years.

IAN WILLMS/TORONTO STAR

Abousfian Abdelrazik, exiled in Sudan for almost six years, hugs supporter Ihsaan Gardee shortly after arriving at Pearson International Airport June 27, 2009.

Abousfian Abdelrazik was five hours into a flight from Abu Dhabi to Toronto when he looked up from behind his glasses in the front row of the darkened cabin and smiled.

"Yes," he had managed to fall asleep for a little while.

"Yes," he had something to eat from the halal menu, which offered lamb kofta with tomato-flavoured rice and cucumber salad with feta cheese.

He nodded and introduced himself but he would save all his other words for when he stepped onto Canadian soil.

"This is a personal and momentous occasion for him," his lawyer Yavar Hameed said by way of explaining the silence of his client, whom the federal government repatriated under fire yesterday after he had to sleep on a cot in the weight room of the Canadian embassy in Khartoum for more than a year.

Abdelrazik had roused Hameed from his slumber in the seat beside him with whispers of how he did not want to talk – about anything at all – until he landed at Pearson International Airport yesterday afternoon.

"That is his wish," said the Ottawa lawyer as Abdelrazik dropped his gaze.

Seven hours later cameras and cheering supporters carrying bright orange

posters surrounded the 47-year-old Sudan-born man from Montreal as he walked into the public area of the airport as other travellers wondered what all the fuss was about.

"I am very glad to come back home," said Abdelrazik, whose grey beard betrays how long it has been since someone took the oft-published photograph of him in a yellow shirt holding a small child on his lap.

"I just flew from Sudan to Canada. I am very tired. I want to say to my supporters from coast to coast, in every town, in every city, in every village, thank you very much for your supporting me and for your effort," he said from the middle of the throng. "Now I am here. Thank you very much and I am glad to be a citizen of this famous nation."

Then he hopped into a vehicle that would carry him to Montreal to be reunited with his children.

It had been a long journey that began years before the June 4 ruling by a Federal Court judge ordering Ottawa to return Abdelrazik from Sudan because as a Canadian citizen he had a Charter right to enter the country – a right which government lawyers had argued only applied if someone showed up at the border asking to be let in.

"The spirit of law and human rights in this country has triumphed," Hameed told supporters in Toronto as he stood next to a beaming but bewildered-looking Abdelrazik yesterday. "It has triumphed over reactionary politics and the egregious practice ... of selective citizenship."

Abdelrazik arrived in Canada in 1990 as a refugee claimant and became a Canadian citizen five years later. He was living in Montreal when he travelled back to Sudan to visit his ailing mother in 2003.

He alleges Sudanese authorities tortured him during two periods of detainment. The Sudanese government released him, and both the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service have said they have no current or substantive information to link him to criminal activity.

He is on a United Nations terrorism blacklist that restricts travel and the finances of alleged associates of Al Qaeda.

Last week the UN Security Council committee that manages the list published the reasons for adding his name, although none of the allegations are new.

The UN alleges he trained at an Al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan, where he allegedly told someone he met Osama bin Laden, twice tried and failed to join Muslims fighting the Russians in Chechnya, and was an acquaintance of Ahmed Ressam, who was convicted in the U.S. for plotting an attack at the Los Angeles airport.

Abdelrazik also knew Adil Charkaoui, a Morocco-born permanent resident of Canada who was arrested in May 2003 under a security certificate.

His passport expired while he was in Sudan and Ottawa said repeatedly it

would grant him an emergency travel document if he obtained a flight itinerary.

But a few hours before he was to board an April 3 flight paid for by his supporters, the government cited the no-fly list as its reason for refusing him one.

On his trip that got him home yesterday he moved swiftly through airports accompanied by two RCMP officers and a diplomatic official from the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum to board two flights arranged and paid for by the federal government.

He spent Friday night in an air-conditioned room at Abu Dhabi International airport after arriving from Khartoum. As soon as he arrived at the gate for his second flight yesterday morning, local security officials whisked him away from the prying eyes of other passengers.

Two Canada Border Services Agency guards greeted him soon after he stepped off the plane in Toronto and marched him through the airport – as he grinned broadly – to a special immigration counter that verified the travel document he had been denied so long.

Then he waited for his duffel bag at the luggage carousel like everyone else before meeting the rest of his legal team – one lawyer, Audrey Brousseau, had tears in her eyes – in a semi-private corridor away from the crowd waiting to welcome him home.