

Abdelrazik 'very glad to come back home'

Stuck in Sudan for nearly 6 years, Montreal man still on 'UN black list,' lawyer says

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Abousfian Abdelrazik smiles as he returns to Canada at Toronto's Pearson International Airport after a six-year exile in Sudan. (Nathan Denette, Canadian Press)

Montrealer Abousfian Abdelrazik returned to Canada on Saturday after spending almost six years stuck in Sudan, where authorities accused him of being an associate of al-Qaeda.

The 47-year-old Sudanese-born man, a Canadian citizen since 1995, arrived by plane around 3:30 p.m. ET at Toronto's Pearson International Airport.

After spending an hour and a half to clear customs, he met briefly with the waiting throng of media and supporters chanting his name.

"I'm very glad to come back home. I'm happy," Abdelrazik said.

"I want to say to my supporters from coast to coast, in every town, every city, every village, thank you very much for your supporting me and through your efforts, now I am here," he said.

"I'm proud to be a citizen of this famous nation. Thank you very much."

Abdelrazik didn't take any questions from the media. Instead, he walked through a group of supporters and reporters to a waiting van and left for Montreal to be reunited with his family.

Abdelrazik was arrested in Sudan in the spring of 2003, a few months after he had arrived to visit his ailing mother. He claims he was tortured during two stints in custody — one lasting 11 months and the other, nine months.

Adding to his problems in jail, his passport expired and he learned he was on the United Nations no-fly list amid allegations he has ties to terrorism.

Abdelrazik had been living at the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum.

He finally left for the first time in 14 months on Friday afternoon. Later in the day, he boarded a flight that made a stopover in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, before resuming the journey home on Saturday morning, according to internet updates provided by his lawyer and supporters.

Paul Champ, one of Abdelrazik's lawyers, said being on the UN no-fly list means more than travel restrictions.

"It's not simply a no-fly list. I guess you can call it a UN black list. That means an asset freeze," Champ told CBC News. "When he gets back to Canada, he's going to be subject to all kinds of conditions.

"He's unlikely to be able to open a bank account. He likely will not be able to have a job, because anyone paying him or giving him money in any way could be regarded as a crime. So he's going to be living with some severe restraints that we're going to be working very hard to lift by whatever means possible," he said.

Both the RCMP and Canadian Security Intelligence Service have cleared Abdelrazik of any terrorist connections. But the Conservative government had refused to issue him travel documents to return home because his name remained on the UN Security Council's list banning travel for terrorist suspects.

On June 4, a judge in Ottawa ordered the federal government to issue travel documents and ensure Abdelrazik is able to return home within 30 days.

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson announced last week that the government would not appeal the Federal Court decision, opening the door for Abdelrazik's return.

The Montreal man's lawyers had successfully argued the government violated his right to mobility under Section 6 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.