

Agencies sent mixed messages on Abdelrazik: documents

March 24, 2009 – Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Federal agencies sent conflicting messages about a former terror suspect many months after a commission of inquiry recommended they sing from the same song sheet on such sensitive cases.

An internal Transport Department document described Abousfian Abdelrazik of Montreal as "a Canadian citizen involved in Islamic extremist activities" late last April - even though the RCMP and Canadian Security Intelligence Service had already cleared him of any links to terrorism.

Abdelrazik's counsel wonder if the mixed messages from Canadian agencies scuttled a Foreign Affairs Department attempt to have his name removed from a United Nations security blacklist.

"That's the concern, because we do know that the request to have Mr. Abdelrazik delisted was refused. Someone vetoed it," Paul Champ, one of his lawyers, said Monday.

Abdelrazik was arrested but not charged during a 2003 visit to Sudan to see his ailing mother. He says CSIS and American FBI officers interrogated him over alleged terrorist links.

Abdelrazik, who denies any involvement in terrorism, was set free, only to be arrested and jailed a second time in October 2005.

Sudanese authorities released him, but Abdelrazik feared being taken into custody again.

An inquiry into the case of Maher Arar, who was tortured in a Syrian prison as a mistaken terror suspect, recommended in September 2006 that the federal government develop a protocol to address issues that arise when a Canadian is detained abroad in connection with terrorism.

"Essential features of this protocol should include consultation among relevant Canadian agencies, a coherent and unified approach in addressing the issues, and political accountability for the course of action adopted," the report said.

The recommendation was among about two dozen suggested changes to prevent a recurrence of the Arar affair. The House of Commons public safety committee resumes hearings Tuesday to examine how the government has responded to the commission led by Justice Dennis O'Connor.

"Mr. Abdelrazik is the exact (kind of) person that the O'Connor recommendations were meant to protect," Champ said.

There's no indication the recommended changes were in place to help Abdelrazik, he said.

"And when you have a Canadian citizen whose physical safety is at risk, that's just totally unacceptable."

Last year Abdelrazik sought haven at the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum, where he has been sleeping on a cot in the foyer. Abdelrazik has been unable to fly home from Sudan because he remains on the UN blacklist.

More than 140 Canadians have chipped in to buy Abdelrazik an airline ticket. But it's still not clear whether he'll be granted an emergency passport to return to Canada.

The April 30, 2008, Transport Canada note about Abdelrazik's alleged involvement in "Islamic extremist activities" is classified secret. A declassified version was obtained by Abdelrazik's lawyers under the federal Privacy Act.

It adds that Transport and other senior government officials "should be mindful of the potential reaction of our U.S. counterparts" to Abdelrazik's possible departure from Sudan given that he is also on the American no-fly list.

In November 2007, CSIS director Jim Judd sent a letter to Foreign Affairs saying the service had "no current substantial information regarding Mr. Abdelrazik."

The next month, a letter from RCMP Assistant Commissioner Mike McDonnell said the Mounties were "unable to locate any current and substantive information that indicates Mr. Abdelrazik is involved in criminal activity."

Transport Canada had no immediate comment on the documents.

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