

ARRESTED IN SUDAN

Canadians 'from all walks of life' come to aid of Abdelrazik

Former UN envoy joins lawyers, former government officials and ordinary citizens in denouncing treatment of Muslim Canadian

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Stephen Lewis, a former UN special envoy, has joined more than 160 Canadians to purchase a flight home for Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen stuck in Sudan because the Harper government won't give him a passport.

Mr. Lewis, who was also Canada's ambassador to the United Nations in the 1980s, joins former solicitor-general Warren Allmand and more than a dozen lawyers and law professors effectively challenging the government's claim that the United Nations is to blame for the Kafkaesque predicament ensnaring Mr. Abdelrazik.

Although he has been cleared by the RCMP, CSIS and the Sudanese police, who imprisoned him apparently at Canada's request for nearly two years, Mr. Abdelrazik remains on the UN Security Council's blacklist of suspected al-Qaeda operatives.

"I'm really surprised and pleased with the variety of people who have wanted to contribute in some way," said Jo Wood, an organizer of Project Fly Home, the group that has purchased a ticket for Mr. Abdelrazik. "They come from all walks of life, from students to labourers to university professors and artists," said Ms. Wood, 70, a member of the Ottawa branch of the Raging Grannies, an activist group of older women.

Unions, peace organizations and rights groups have also contributed. Contributions have come from across Canada and from Canadians living abroad. Most of the donations are small, \$10 or \$20.

Claudia Schibler, 53, a disabled Canadian veteran who served in Bosnia, said she was infuriated by the government's treatment of Mr. Abdelrazik.

"Some of us put on the uniform and risked life and limb for values that we [Canadians] are privileged to have," Ms. Schibler said.

"I thought that people who came to our country and who hadn't known the freedoms that we have should be treated just like any other citizen," the former army sergeant said from her home in Halifax.

Mr. Abdelrazik, whose children live in Montreal, was arrested in Khartoum while visiting his mother in 2003.

Foreign Affairs documents marked "secret" say his arrest and imprisonment was at Canada's request. Mr. Abdelrazik, a Muslim, says he was beaten and tortured in prison although Canadian Justice Department lawyers have tried to discredit those claims by suggesting he mutilated himself.

"Just like the Germans zeroed in on the Jews, we are zeroing in on Muslims ... this is so wrong," Ms. Schibler said.

After refusing him a passport for years, the Harper government promised in writing that it would give Mr. Abdelrazik a temporary emergency travel document if he could get a confirmed reservation for a flight home. Most airlines, including Air Canada, have refused to carry him because the Bush administration also put him on the U.S. no-fly list. However, when Etihad Airways, based in Abu Dhabi, agreed to fly him home last September, the government imposed a new condition: that he have a fully paid-for ticket.

Mr. Abdelrazik, destitute and living in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum for the past 10 months, is subject to an assets freeze because of the UN blacklist. The government also made clear that anyone giving him money or help might be breaking Canadian law.

"If they want to send us to jail, let them, but we cannot sit passively by while this government does nothing," said Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, a retired hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America and a contributor to the ticket purchase.

Audrey Macklin, an associate law professor at the University of Toronto, said Mr. Abdelrazik's case is only one of a series where the Canadian government has failed to protect its citizens abroad. "The fact that [in Mr. Abdelrazik's case] there are no charges makes Canada's obstruction [to his return home] all the more egregious," she said.

The government claims it must abide by the travel ban imposed by UN Resolution 1267 on those blacklisted, although a specific exemption allows for them to return to their country of citizenship.

Prof. Macklin scoffed at the government's implied threat to charge those buying the ticket.

"This is absolutely not an act of civil disobedience. There is nothing about our actions that violates any law ... [there would] simply be no basis for a conviction," she said.

Boyce Richardson, an author and filmmaker, said it was "bloody awful" the way Mr. Abdelrazik is being treated by the Harper government. There seems, he said, to be "at least two classes of Canadian citizen," adding Mr. Abdelrazik is not the only case of a Muslim Canadian not being treated as a full citizen.

David Orchard, a Saskatchewan farmer who has dabbled in Conservative and Liberal politics, added his view. "I don't like torture and I don't like Canadian citizens being tortured and I don't like our government asking foreign governments to do the torturing." He said he was appalled at the "the hypocrisy of our government condemning Sudan for human-rights abuses and then approaching them and asking them to pick up a Canadian citizen."

Many of the contributors voiced dismay that more Canadians aren't angered by the government's lack of effort on Mr. Abdelrazik's behalf.

"Too many comfortable members of society ignore those people being picked on and abused," said Daniel Saykaly, 58, vice-president of the human-rights group Palestinian and Jewish Unity. "The government is trying to block a citizen from coming home, yet they are giving him asylum in the embassy."