

Terror list betrays ideals of the UN

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If all goes well, Abousfian Abdelrazik will land back in Montreal this weekend. This Sudanese-born Canadian citizen was trapped in involuntary exile for six years, until the federal government said it would comply with a court order to let him return to Canada.

About time. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service have cleared him, he has been charged with no crimes, and yet his basic rights as a citizen have been violated by successive Canadian governments. This is a truly frightening precedent: If Ottawa can do this to one citizen, which citizen is safe?

Abdelrazik was treated this way because he is named on a United Nations terrorism blacklist - a patchwork of innuendo, rumour, claims extracted under torture, guesswork, and unproven allegations. Federal Court Judge Russell Zinn characterized the UN terror list as a "violation of natural justice" and "like Kafka." But until Zinn's scathing ruling, our federal government accepted this list as gospel.

This troubling document names some 370 people, each put there without trial. Those listed do not have the right to know what allegations have been made against them, nor by whom, nor even which country has asked that they be listed. There is no way off the list once on.

Somebody somewhere is still after Abdelrazik. After Canada said he could return, details of the unproven claims against him were made public: He knows Osama bin Laden, was in a Montreal Al-Qa'ida cell, etc. He has denied all this.

The UN seems to have forgotten the bedrock concept of innocence until proof of guilt. Is this the same UN that passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? That document promises all "the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which (the accused) has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence."

Even the official in charge of compiling the list admits it is deeply flawed: "There are names on there that shouldn't be there," Richard Barrett told the CBC. "I think there are names there without enough identifying particulars."

We're all in favour of charging, convicting, and punishing terrorists. But state terror - which is a bigger nightmare around the world than the freelance kind - begins with the idea that people can be treated as guilty on the whim of a faceless office-holder.

This list is a lawless charade. The UN should abolish it.