

## Criminalizing charity

Mar 14, 2009 - 04:30 AM

Is Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government prepared to criminalize empathy? If not, it shouldn't even *consider* bringing charges against the 115 Canadians and others who chipped in to buy a \$996 plane ticket to bring Abousfian Abdelrazik home from Sudan. He's the Montrealer who has been stuck in Khartoum since 2003.

The Sudanese first held him for suspected terrorist ties but found no evidence. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have no evidence of wrongdoing. And Ottawa said it would give him travel documents to come home if he got a paid-up air ticket. In the meantime, he has been granted "safe haven" at the Canadian embassy for nearly a year.

Inexplicably, Abdelrazik remains on a United Nations terror watch list. His lawyer believes he was jailed on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's recommendation. As a Canadian, he can legally return home. But in the bizarre world of 9/11 security, the people who shelled out for his ticket can be charged and sentenced to 10 years for financially helping someone who is on the UN list, his lawyer says.

The contributors include former Liberal cabinet minister Warren Allmand and former Progressive Conservative leadership candidate David Orchard, plus university professors, lawyers, artists and others.

This is crazy. These people are not Al Qaeda sympathizers with criminal intent. They are decent folk who are acting out of pity for a stranded Canadian whose own government won't help. They deserve credit, not condemnation. It would be outrageous to charge them.

Harper should issue a statement that the anti-terror laws have no bearing on this case. Then get Abdelrazik on the first flight home.