

Abdelrazik seeks to clear his name

After six years of prison and exile in Sudan, Canadian wants those responsible for his ordeal to face justice

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Back home in Canada after six years of prison and forced exile, Abousfian Abdelrazik is embarking on a new battle to clear his name and hold Canadian officials responsible for his ordeal.

Lawyers for Mr. Abdelrazik have not ruled out seeking a formal apology or compensation such as that offered to Maher Arar.

Speaking to reporters after an appearance in Federal Court, Mr. Abdelrazik said he is not on a hunt for retribution.

“I want those people who played a role in this matter to face justice, not because I seek revenge, [but] because I want this not to happen to any Canadian citizen any more. [It] stops here.”

The 47-year-old, accompanied by a coterie of lawyers and supporters, appeared before a Federal Court judge in Montreal – the same judge whose harsh ruling about Ottawa's treatment of Mr. Abdelrazik paved the way for the exile's return to Canadian soil 11 days ago.

Mr. Abdelrazik had been detained in his native Sudan on suspicion of involvement with al-Qaeda.

Judge Russel Zinn ordered Tuesday's court appearance as evidence Ottawa had complied with his ruling, and the justice welcomed Mr. Abderlrazik home.

While Mr. Abdelrazik is now a free man, living in Montreal with a 26-year-old stepdaughter and 15-year-old daughter, his troubles are far from over, his lawyers say.

Because his name appears on a UN terrorist watch list, he can't receive money, a job or social assistance in Canada. Before he left for Sudan in 2003, in what turned into prolonged and unwanted exile, Mr. Abdelrazik worked in Montreal as a machinist.

“I want to [return] to my normal life and I want to remove myself from the list of the United Nations because this list is unjust and unfair, and makes my life very difficult,” he said.

Lawyers have not excluded the possibility of seeking compensation from Ottawa. Mr. Arar received \$10-million for Canada's role in getting him sent to Syria, where he was tortured.

“What would you do if you were in his shoes, living in exile for six years?” lawyer Audrey Brousseau asked in an interview.

Mr. Abdelrazik, who claims he was tortured while detained in Sudan, requires medical care for “important physical and psychological scars,” she said.

The lawyers will make presentations to the UN to get Mr. Abdelrazik removed from the list, and may try to

enlist the support of the Canadian government. The legal team is requesting a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon and Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Cannon would not comment on Canada's willingness to get Mr. Abdelrazik off the UN list.

“He's an individual associated with Al-Qaeda, so the government of Canada has a responsibility that we take very seriously for the safety of our citizens,” she said.

Mr. Abdelrazik was arrested and imprisoned while visiting his ailing mother in Sudan and also spent more than a year camped in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum as he tried in vain to come home.

Though Mr. Abdelrazik was labelled a terrorist and al-Qaeda operative by the UN Security Council, both CSIS and the RCMP say they have no evidence of involvement in terrorist activities.

Meanwhile, after Judge Zinn ordered Mr. Abdelrazik's return to Canada a month ago, a UN Security Council committee posted fresh allegations that the Montreal resident was a senior al-Qaeda operative.

Judge Zinn said in court Tuesday he had no way of knowing if the new allegations were founded or might one day be proven. But he said the assertions were yet unproven, and he ended with some words of counsel.

“The past is history and the present is now. I urge you to let the future be shaped by the present, Mr. Abdelrazik, and not by the past.”

Mr. Abdelrazik had wanted to make a statement to the judge expressing his appreciation, but the judge refused. “He was treated as every other citizen of this country,” Judge Zinn said.