



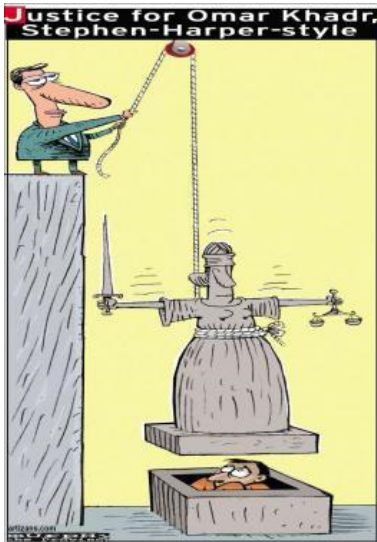
## Fight for freedom is global

Published Friday June 26th, 2009

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Over the past two weeks, Canadians have been watching the news and reading the accounts of a brutal fight for human rights in Iran. While the images on the computer screens, televisions and the printed pages appear a world away, they can hit much closer to home than most Canadians realize.

[ENLARGE PHOTO](#)



It is amazing how the impact of an international struggle in a sovereign nation can reverberate so widely around the globe.

However, the outcome of political unrest surrounding a Middle East power broker will have a major global impact. How the world reacts could have major consequences.

I won't pretend to understand the many facets involved in the potential Iranian revolution, nor can I offer sage advice to world leaders on how to handle the situation. That I will leave to experts in world politics, such as Gwynne Dyer. But, the willingness of millions of Iranians to risk their lives for just a little more democracy – combined with the lack of press freedom to tell their story – should make Canadians more appreciative of the democratic society – flaws and all – which they enjoy.

Unfortunately, other recent headlines indicate those cherished freedoms are not extended to all Canadians equally. Canadians, in general, when charged with crimes, have charter rights to enable them to receive a fair trial. That's not the case for some, especially those of Muslim descent, who are accused – without proof – of being terrorists.

Sudanese-Canadian Abousfian Abdelrazik serves as a prime example of the two levels of citizens in the eyes of the current government. After being imprisoned in the Sudan, apparently at the request of Canadian spy agency officials, Abdelrazik was tortured and then released without charges being laid. He was then put on an international no-fly list at the request of the Bush administration and banned from returning home. He spent years at the Canadian Sudanese embassy, exiled from his family in Montreal, primarily because of the Harper government's political ideology.

The Canadian government used every method at its disposal to deny a Canadian his charter rights despite a total lack of evidence supporting allegations against him.

The same ideology led the Harper government to be the only western democracy refusing to repatriate its citizens from Guantanamo Bay. Omar Khadr, whose family admittedly had strong al-Qaeda ties, has spent the last seven years in the infamous – and by many experts' accounts, illegal – detention facility. That's despite such facts as Khadr's age of 15 when arrested on the battlefield in Afghanistan and ample doubt about his role in the killing of an American soldier during a battle.

As all other western nations try to protect their citizens, Canada continues to argue in court that Canadians accused of crimes abroad are no longer entitled to basic charter rights.

No one doubts that both Abdelrazik and Khadr have associations which raised concerns. But to skirt Canada's basic legal rights because of ethnic background, possible associations and where the accusations originate puts all Canadians at risk.

As Canadians proudly put their democratic freedoms on display as examples to such nations as Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, China and North Korea, an overzealous Harper government is undermining those basic rights.

As Canadian troops fall on the battlefield to bring freedom to the oppressed people of Afghanistan, it is vital that basic human rights are promoted to their full extent in Canada. As brave and determined Iranians risk their lives to march for freedom in Tehran, Canadians should enjoy the ability to safely protest the actions of their own government.

Canadians must realize the freedoms they enjoy cannot be taken for granted.

They must also understand when the government denies basic charter rights on one person – even if their background, opinions and lifestyle differ greatly from their own – it puts the rights of everyone at risk.

It's easy to fight for the rights of those with whom we agree, but a true test of freedom is the willingness to fight for the rights of those who oppose us.

Canada can still take the high ground when demanding Iran exercise human rights. Let's hope we can always stand as proud.