

Gift sent to Abdelrazik while in Sudan returned because "unknown at embassy"

By Ciara Byrne (CP) – 2009-12-07

MONTREAL — Abousfian Abdelrazik's ordeal gained national attention last year, as supporters fought for the Sudanese-Canadian to return home to Canada after his six year ordeal trapped in Sudan.

But it seems that not everyone at the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum, where Abdelrazik stayed for a year, knew about their house guest, or they had simply forgot.

At least that's what the red scribble on a care package sent to Abdelrazik seemed to indicate.

A gift sent months ago to Abdelrazik by supporters in Montreal was returned to the group recently because the recipient was "unknown at embassy."

"We were all surprised," said Maria Forti, a member for Project Fly Home, which campaigned for Abdelrazik's return to Canada.

"He was probably the most surprised because he had known the people at the embassy, because he had been living there for about a year," she said, about the mysterious message written on the box.

"It was absurd, and I had a lot of frustration about that. For me, it's a big lack of respect towards Abousfian," Emilie Breton, also a member of Project Fly Home said, adding she felt enraged that a simple gift from friends could be refused.

The package was sent in April as a way of keeping Abdelrazik's spirits high, as he battled Canadian officials for his right to return home.

Abdelrazik was told a package arrived for him, but that he would not be able to receive it.

To top it off, Canada Post rubbed a little more salt in the wound.

"We ended up having to pay a \$120 return to sender fee," said Forti, adding the group who sent the package had already dished out \$130 to send the gift to Sudan in the first place.

"We had no idea that we would be required to pay the return to sender fee when actually the recipient was living where we said he was living," said Forti, giving an exasperated laugh.

Abdelrazik was arrested in Sudan in 2003 while visiting his sick mother and spent almost six years in prison because of alleged links to terrorist organizations.

He was released but due to passport problems he couldn't return home and was forced to stay at the embassy for 14 months before finally returning this past June.

At a meeting this week with Forti and others, Abdelrazik finally opened his gift, which finally made its way back to Canada in late November.

Forti described opening the package, like unsealing a time capsule, as letters, and photos from supporters were stuffed inside, as well as DVDs, a button down shirt, a pair of sandals and an Arab-French dictionary.

"He was really happy to get it back," said Forti "He loved it, he was glad he finally got all that stuff."

"I guess it reminded him of the long year he passed alone in the embassy, but also it was good for him to see there were people trying to help him," Breton said.

Foreign Affairs did not have an immediate answer as to why the note on the package suggested the embassy did not know Abdelrazik was there.

Copyright © 2009 The Canadian Press. All rights reserved.