

Help sought for Canadian stranded in Sudan

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Canadian peace activist James Loney, once held hostage in Iraq, knows what it is like to spend months "aching and yearning with my whole being to come home."

That is why he led a demonstration in downtown Toronto yesterday to raise awareness about Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen

stranded in Sudan and living inside the embassy because Ottawa refuses to give him a passport on grounds of national security.

Loney said he is "astonished, saddened and outraged" the government's efforts to secure his release in 2006 have not been extended to 47-year-old Abdelrazik, a Montreal man who first came to Canada in 1990 and who has been suspected of terrorist affiliations.

Particularly egregious is the attempt to "actively block" Abdelrazik from returning home, which is "an attack on citizenship itself," said Loney, who led 40 protesters from the passport office on Victoria St., to the offices of the Department of Justice on King St. W., and the Canadian spy agency on Front St.

"In the so-called war on terror, people are arbitrarily deprived of their rights, scapegoated, detained," said Loney, who was held hostage in Iraq for four months.

Abdelrazik alleges he returned to Sudan in 2003 to visit his ill mother, and was arrested and tortured. Foreign affairs department documents suggest he was detained on the recommendation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, who interrogated him in Sudanese custody. After almost two years in jail, he was released. He was never charged and was cleared of suspicion by the RCMP and CSIS. Even though he remains on a UN no-fly list, it does not prevent countries from bringing home their nationals.

"This Conservative government apparently believes that referring to someone as a terrorist, even if they are not one, is all the justification they need to deny someone their

fundamental rights," said protester Pascal Murphy, one of 225 Canadians who pitched in to buy Abdelrazik a plane ticket home.

In Ottawa yesterday, the parliamentary foreign affairs committee passed a motion to call Abdelrazik as a witness, which is one way of bringing him home. The Conservatives abstained from the vote.

"It's a matter of just following through with the appropriate travel arrangements to have him come before committee," said Paul Dewar, the NDP foreign affairs critic.

Abdelrazik's lawyers will be in Ottawa Thursday arguing in federal court that his right to enter Canada, protected under the Charter of Rights, has been breached.

With files from Joanna Smith