

Press Release

Care package withheld from Abousfian Abdelrazik: What is Ottawa afraid of?

Montreal, 4 June 2009 - "Withholding a support package of letters and clothing on grounds of security is ridiculous. What is Ottawa afraid of?" asks Émilie Breton of Project Fly Home, a group formed to support the return home of Montrealer Abousfian Abdelrazik.

"A care package containing letters of encouragement and support, notebooks for him to write and draw in, an Arab-English dictionary, two button-down shirts, a pair of sandals, a purple silk flag with a bird and the words "Solidarity across Borders" written on it, and two entertainment DVDs was assembled and sent to Khartoum to keep up Abousfian's spirits. We are outraged that Canadian officials are refusing to deliver the package to him," continued Lisa Stepnuk, who also helped put the package together.

The package was mailed on 22 April, and the tracking record shows that it was received by customs in Sudan on 26 April. But Project Fly Home has learned that Eric O'Connor, consular manager of the embassy, has had to wait for instructions from Ottawa on how to proceed, while the package has been left at the post office for weeks. Abdelrazik has already received smaller packages, letters of support and even US\$1.

Mr. Abdelrazik has been stuck in the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum since April 28, 2008, the date he went public with his story. For over a year he has been a prisoner in the compound, unable to leave, waiting to come home. The Conservative government has so far refused to issue him the travel documents which would allow him to return to Canada.

In response to an invitation by the Parliamentary standing committee to appear on 15 June, Mr. Abdelrazik has rebooked his return ticket for 12 June.

The withholding of the package is one more blow to the little freedom that Abdelrazik, who has never been charged with a crime, currently has. It also sheds more light on the extent to which Ottawa is keeping tight reigns on Abdelrazik while refusing to give any logical reasons for doing so.

Abdelrazik's story resembles those of other Canadians such as Abdullah Almalki, Ahmed El Maati and Muiyyed Nureddine. All were arrested without charge overseas - with the involvement of Canadian officials - and tortured. Their stories raise very troubling and important questions for all in Canada about two-tiered citizenship, racism, the use of "lists" and other arbitrary processes, expanding state power, and the involvement of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in torture.

For six years, Abdelrazik has been blocked from returning to Canada and raising these questions here.

In March 2009, a ticket was purchased for Abdelrazik by more than 100 people across Canada, in open defiance of the government's position that they could be criminally charged

for contributing financially to someone on a UN "black list". But on 3 April, Foreign Affairs minister Lawrence Cannon once again prevented Abdelrazik 's return, using his discretionary power to block the travel document Abdelrazik needed to board his flight.

Now, with almost 250 people having contributed to the fund, Abdelrazik is hoping to be on the way home on 12 June.

In the meantime, as the long days of waiting weigh heavily on his spirits, Abdelrazik wants to receive all of the moral support sent his way.

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