

## Ottawa given evidence of torture, official says

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Ministers in the Harper government were presented with evidence that a Canadian citizen had been tortured in Sudanese jails, according to the sworn testimony of a senior Foreign Affairs official made public yesterday.

Abousfian Abdelrazik, labelled an al-Qaeda operative by the Bush administration and imprisoned in Khartoum at Canada's request – according to secret Canadian government documents – has long claimed he was tortured.

Canadian diplomats have attached no credence to those claims.

But last March, while being questioned by Deepak Obhrai, Canada's junior foreign minister, Mr. Abdelrazik lifted his shirt to show scars that he said were inflicted by whippings with cables. The marks were still clearly evident on his torso more than two years after the alleged torture.

“Is it true that during that meeting, as far as you are aware, Mr. Abdelrazik showed marks on his body which he claimed were the result of torture?” Sean Robertson, the most senior Foreign Affairs official handling consular cases was asked in pretrial cross-examination of witnesses in a Federal Court case intended to force the government to bring Mr. Abdelrazik home.

“That's my understanding, yes,” Mr. Robertson answered. “That was what was reported in the summary of the meeting.”

Mr. Obhrai didn't immediately return calls on what, if anything, he did after being shown Mr. Abdelrazik's scars.

Although Sudan's long, grim record of human-rights violations, its brutal treatment of prisoners and vile and ill-equipped prisons are a matter of long-standing international record, Mr. Robertson's testimony confirms for the first time that allegations of torture and abuse of a Canadian citizen were known to an individual close to the inner circles of the Harper government.

It's clear from thousands of pages of classified documents dating back to 2002 that the highest levels of government had been kept informed about the jailing of Mr. Abdelrazik

in Khartoum, his interrogation by CSIS officers while in prison, his release and the refusal of the successive government to renew his Canadian passport.

But if the government failed to act after knowing he had been tortured, it could prove a political bombshell. The Harper government has already paid \$10-million in compensation to Maher Arar for the complicity of Canadian anti-terrorist agents in fingering him falsely to U.S. authorities who sent him to Syria where he was tortured.

Even after Mr. Abdelrazik showed the scars to Mr. Obhrai, senior officials in the government were dismissing his allegations that he was tortured.

“Conditions in Sudanese prisons are very difficult, but this does not amount to torture or mistreatment,” Odette Gaudet-Fee, the department’s Africa case manager wrote weeks after the meeting with Mr. Obhrai. She reports to Mr. Robertson. “It is the reality in Sudan and he would not have been targeted for mistreatment any more than other fellow detainees,” she added.