

PM failing Abdelrazik, opposition parties charge

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Opposition MPs accused the Harper government yesterday of dereliction of duty in failing to bring home Abousfian Abdelrazik, the Canadian stranded in Sudan.

"We are here to expose the Kafkaesque character of Mr. Abdelrazik's" predicament, said Irwin Cotler, the Liberal MP and international human-rights advocate, who was joined at an Ottawa news conference by Paul Dewar, the NDP foreign affairs critic, and Paul Crête, foreign affairs critic of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Cotler, who represented Maher Arar, the Canadian falsely fingered as an Islamic extremist by the RCMP who was subsequently imprisoned and tortured in Syria, said there are strong parallels between the two cases.

"In both cases we had Canadian citizens who were detained and tortured aboard, in both cases it became clear that there was no reason for their initial detention to begin with, let alone with their torture," he said.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly apologized to Mr. Arar and approved a \$10-million payout for the role Canadian security agencies played in his years of imprisonment and torture.

Mr. Abdelrazik, who has been cleared in writing of any terrorist or criminal activity by both the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service and the RCMP, remains stranded in Khartoum because the Harper government refuses to issue him either a passport or an emergency travel document.

Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon says Mr. Abdelrazik must get himself removed from the UN terrorist blacklist first - a seemingly impossible condition given the government failed to have him delisted when it applied more than a year ago - before he can return home.

In a conference call from The Hague, Mr. Cannon repeatedly refused yesterday to explain why the government will not allow Mr. Abdelrazik to return to Canada. At first, he parried questions, saying he would speak only about the Afghanistan conference, then said his parliamentary secretary, Deepak Obhrai, has answered those questions - Mr. Obhrai has not - and then said the matter is before the courts.

"It's a matter that is the subject of judicial review, so I don't have any other comments to make on it," he said.

A specific exemption allows for those on the UN list to return home and the opposition MPs accused the government of misrepresenting the UN as the reason for blocking Mr. Abdelrazik's return. "He has the right, both under the Charter and under international law, to return to Canada and it is the Canadian government that is impeding that," Mr. Cotler said.

"To hide behind a fictitious shield and to refuse to return him to Canada is to compound this Kafkaesque nightmare."

Mr. Crête said "every day Mr. Abdelrazik remains in the Sudan is another day when his rights are being violated."

Mr. Abdelrazik has lived in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum for nearly a year. He left Canada in 2003 to visit his ailing mother in Khartoum, was arrested (government documents suggest it was at the request of Canadian security agents) spent 19 months in prison where he says he was beaten and tortured before eventually being released after Sudan said it could no longer detain an innocent man at the behest of foreign governments.

Canada also rejected a Sudanese offer to fly Mr. Abdelrazik back to his family in Montreal on a Sudanese government flight.

Last year the government said he would be issued a travel document if he could find an airline willing to carry him. When he did, that requirement was changed to a fully paid ticket.

Last month, more than 160 Canadian raised funds to buy the ticket.

"Now that the ticket has been purchased, not by the government of Canada, but by Canadians, the government has changed its tune again," Mr. Dewar said. "I don't understand why the government is playing these games with one of our citizens."

With a report from

Campbell Clark in Ottawa