

Passport protest

Stefan Christoff

Canadians buy ticket to bring tortured Montrealer home

At the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, Sudan, Montrealer Abousfian Abdelrazik continues to languish - confined within embassy walls and barred from returning to Canada by the Conservative government in Ottawa.

Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen, has been stuck in Sudan since 2002 when he travelled to visit his ill mother. He was imprisoned by Sudanese authorities for two years and tortured before being released without charges.



Abdelrazik and his daughter

After an access to information request was submitted to the government by Abdelrazik's lawyers, documents revealed a disturbingly similar post-9/11 pattern whereby innocent Canadian citizens were tortured in distant nations with the complicity of Canadian authorities.

Despite being cleared of any charges by both Canadian and Sudanese authorities, to date Canadian authorities have not allowed Abdelrazik to return to Canada.

Enraged by the case, a growing number of supporters for Abdelrazik recently banded together to purchase an airplane ticket for his return to Montreal. "Abdelrazik is one of way too many Canadian citizens who are racialized and are getting shafted by the Conservative government. These types of systematic attacks on human rights have to be challenged," says Karl Flecker, the national director of the anti-racism and human rights department at the Canadian Labour Congress.

While Abdelrazik's plane is set to arrive April 3, it remains to be seen if the Canadian government will live up to their end of the agreement and issue Abdelrazik travel documents necessary for the flight, a condition required by the government. Abdelrazik currently has no personal items in his possession.

"The sheer number of people who contributed to the ticket for Abdelrazik illustrates the public outrage about this case. The Conservative government insists on allowing this citizen to languish in Sudan, while citizens who aren't black or Muslim, like Brenda Martin - who was imprisoned in Mexico and eventually flown home on a government-chartered jet - are treated so differently. This speaks volumes about the racism in this government."

Numerous union leaders, public figures, activists and artists contributed to the purchase of Abdelrazik's airplane ticket, including Stephen Lewis, despite warnings by the Canadian government that those contributing financially towards the cause might face "terrorism"-related charges.

"To collectively purchase the airplane ticket was an excellent strategy to force this issue into the public sphere," says Anna Kruzynski, a social activist and professor at the school of community and public affairs at Concordia University. "This was an interesting act of civil disobedience that so many people were willing to risk serious consequences to stand against this continued injustice."

Abdelrazik's airplane ticket was purchased for Friday, April 3, and on the same date supporters will gather in Montreal for a protest at the Canadian passport office at 8:30 a.m., Guy-Favreau Complex (200 René-Lévesque Blvd.). For more info, visit www.peoplescommission.org/abdelrazik.php.