

Former terror suspect may face difficult homecoming

Some do not want Canadian man to return from Sudan

BY MIKE BLANCHFIELD, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JUNE 26, 2009

The Foreign Affairs Department has been told that there is "reticence" in some quarters over Abousfian Abdelrazik's planned homecoming to Canada from Sudan, Canwest News Service has learned.

No country or individuals were named as the source of that sentiment, but a letter from the Justice Department to Abdelrazik's lawyer last week raises the possibility that the Sudanese-born, Canadian citizen might face obstacles on his journey back to Canada this weekend after his six years of exile in Sudan.

"I wish to inform you that DFAIT has encountered some reticence in getting assurances that your client will be able to board a flight," said the June 18 letter from the Justice Department to Abdelrazik's lawyer, Yavar Hameed.

As Hameed travelled to Sudan earlier this week to accompany his client back to Canada, he raised the possibility that the United States, which has labelled Abdelrazik a terrorist, might try to apprehend him after he leaves the sanctuary of the Canadian Embassy in Khartoum, where he has lived for the past 13 months.

In an interview from Sudan on Thursday, Hameed said that the Canadian government still could not guarantee that Abdelrazik would be able to make the journey unimpeded. In particular, Abdelrazik still has not been given categorical assurance from a third country, through which he must transit after departing Sudan, that he will be able pass through freely.

Abdelrazik is on a United Nations no-fly list at the request of the United States. The UN reposted allegations on its website this week linking Abdelrazik to al-Qaida and terrorist activities, repeating three-year-old allegations by the U.S. government.

Abdelrazik denies he is a terrorist, but admits to knowing the so-called Millennium bomber, Ahmed Ressaym of Montreal. Abdelrazik testified against Ressaym at his trial.

Although Hameed would not discuss his client's travel plans, Canwest News has learned that Abdelrazik has a lengthy layover in the United Arab Emirates capital of Abu Dhabi on Friday before boarding a flight for Toronto that arrives late Saturday afternoon.

"I'm concerned that the government can't be completely forthright with us, to tell us the necessary safeguards or assurances have been made," Hameed said from Khartoum.

"There are some ongoing discussions we're having with them. They have not resolved to our satisfaction at this point. So there is still risk."

Ottawa NDP MP Paul Dewar, who has taken up the case, said there are no guarantees until Abdelrazik actually touches down in Toronto.

"It's a long haul. I remain concerned. This should be a no-brainer," said Dewar.

Abdelrazik has been stuck in his birth country for six years, in an ordeal that has seen him repeatedly imprisoned and, by his account, tortured by Sudanese jailers.

He returned to his birth country in 2003 to visit an ailing mother more than a decade after getting his Canadian citizenship and starting a family in Montreal. He had fled Sudan in 1989 to escape the regime that is now in power there.

A recent Federal Court ruling ordered the government to ensure he is safely returned to Canada and blasted the fundamental fairness of the UN terrorism list.

On his journey home, Abdelrazik is to be accompanied by a member of the Foreign Affairs Department, as called for by the June 4 court decision.

"In my view this is required to ensure that Mr. Abdelrazik is not stopped or delayed in his return to Canada while in transit or when laying-over at a foreign airport. The escort is to use his very best efforts to ensure that Mr. Abdelrazik returns to Canada unimpeded," wrote Federal Court Justice Russel Zinn.