

# Abousfian Abdelrazik faces continued challenges despite joyful homecoming



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MONTREAL - Despite his joy at setting foot on Canadian soil after six years in exile in Sudan, the end of Abousfian Abdelrazik's long journey remains unclear.

Arriving in Montreal in the early hours of Sunday morning, flashing a wide smile and a peace sign and flanked by family members and friends, Abdelrazik thanked his supporters for their efforts in bringing him home.

"I'm very happy to come back home and to be in this lovely town and with very kind fellow Canadians," he said, his arm wrapped around his stepdaughter and his hand resting on his son's head.

"It's a great feeling. I'm very happy to see my family and to see my town and to be in my city with my people. I'm very happy, very happy. Thank you very much for everything and God bless you."

His stepdaughter Wafa Sahnine also praised those who lobbied for her father's return.

"It's a relief and a struggle that's finally over," she said.

"He's been gone for six years and the next few weeks will serve to rebuild our family."

The 47-year-old Sudan-born man from Montreal arrived back in Canada on Saturday, landing in Toronto where he was received by cheering supporters at Pearson International Airport.

He then made the six-hour drive to Montreal, arriving shortly after midnight, where he was greeted with a festive atmosphere and banners welcoming him home.

Citing exhaustion after his 36-hour journey from Sudan's capital city of Khartoum, Abdelrazik made only a brief statement before ushering his family back into the downtown hotel where he was spending the night.

Advocates like Salam Elmenyaw, president of the Muslim Council of Montreal, say they are relieved to see Abdelrazik home after so long, but note he still faces legal constraints that will prevent his full reintegration into Canadian life.

"We hope he will be able to find his way after such a difficult time," he said.

"But the sweetness of this moment overcomes many of the other feelings that we have. The key issue is to continue to work and to go after what is right."

His lawyer Yavar Hameed, who travelled to the Sudanese capital to bring his client home, notes Abdelrazik's listing on a United Nations no-fly list at the request of the United States means he will live with a string of restrictions.

"He has a freeze of assets, it's a federal offence to employ him, to give him money," Hameed said.

"There's all sorts of barriers to him just leading a normal life."

His legal team will be seeking exemptions from these restrictions before deciding whether or not to challenge the listing itself. But de-listing requires unanimity at the UN Security Council, a hitch that Hameed says may be insurmountable.

"The United States is the country that put him on," he said.

"Do they want him off? That's a big question. It becomes a political decision for the States."

Further, Ottawa loaned Abdelrazik \$400 a month during his 14-month sojourn at Canada's embassy in Khartoum.

"It adds up to somewhere around \$7,000, which the government of Canada apparently intends to get back from him," Hameed said.

"So from the get-go we have to resolve this balance sheet."

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff and foreign affairs critic Bob Rae released a joint statement on Sunday welcoming Abdelrazik home and saying Canadians deserve answers to the slew of questions raised by his treatment at the hands of the Tory government.

But asked for a statement on Abdelrazik's return and whether they would support his attempts to seek exemptions, the Prime Minister's Office released a one-line response.

"We complied with the court order," said PMO press secretary Dimitri Soudas in an email.

Abdelrazik was arrested during a 2003 visit to Sudan to see his ill mother and accused of having ties to al-Qaida, but was never charged.

Abdelrazik claims he was tortured before Sudanese authorities eventually released him and says CSIS and American FBI officers interrogated him over alleged terrorist links.

Both the RCMP and CSIS cleared him of any involvement in terrorism or crime and Abdelrazik has also denied ties to Osama bin Laden.

Abdelrazik spent the past 14 months living on a cot in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum. Even though supporters chipped in to buy him a ticket home, his passport had expired and he could not leave Sudan without one.

In April, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon reneged on a promise to issue Abdelrazik an emergency passport if he could get a plane ticket.

It was not until the Federal Court of Canada ordered the Harper government to issue him a passport earlier this month that he was finally cleared to come home.

Abdelrazik is due in Federal Court on July 7 for a routine appearance to prove he made it back to Canada.

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