

people's commission

Press Release

Mohamed Harkat barred from attending dinner in his honour **Popular Forum: Whose Security? Our Security! Countering the national security agenda**

Montreal, 3 February 2011 – A community dinner in Montreal in support of Mohamed Harkat – engaged in an eight-year battle against deportation to torture on the basis of secret suspicions - will have to go ahead without its guest of honour. Mohamed Harkat learned late last week that the Canadian Border Services Agency refused his request to attend the dinner, organized as the closing event of a Montreal conference on national security.

CBSA, which is in charge of enforcing the strict bail conditions imposed on Mr. Harkat, stated that Mr. Harkat could not attend because of the “the nature of the proposed event, its anticipated participants, as well as its venue”. The event, a free vegetarian dinner, will take place at a Montreal university.

The agency referred specifically to Mr. Harkat’s condition of non-association with “any person whom Mr. Harkat knows, or ought to know, supports terrorism or violent Jihad or [...] who poses a threat to national security.”

"The way in which national security can be used as a blanket justification for such abusive, arbitrary decisions is exactly why it is necessary to hold this important forum," stated the People's Commission Network, which is organizing the Whose Security? Our Security! conference.

"CBSA does not name anyone who fits this description, and therefore smears everyone at the gathering as a potential national security threat. Is it a threat to discuss the meaning of “national security” and how it is applied? To plan to resist repressive national security measures such as security certificates and blacklists? Or is CBSA referring to speakers at the conference who have been labeled “threats” in the past, but have since been cleared – meaning that, in their view, you can never be cleared from these sorts allegations?”

Whose Security? Our Security! is a weekend-long gathering focusing on both the historic and contemporary role “national security” plays in domestic repression. It will feature interactive events such as a virtual “walking tour” of Montreal's "militaro-security-industrial complex" and first-hand testimonies about the manner in which agencies such as CSIS have harassed members of certain communities. Among the panel discussions will be an exploration of the community and political impacts of “black-listing” groups such as the FARC, PKK, LTTE and Babar Khalsa. The forum will consist of both educational panels and working sessions to coordinate campaigns and struggles of different communities and their allies.

Among the gathering's high-profile invitees are former security certificate detainee Hassan Almrei, Abousfian Abdelrazik, Sophie Lamarche Harkat, Kanehsatake activist Ellen Gabriel, author and activist academic Gary Kinsman, historian Ian McKay, and Dominique Peschard, President, Ligue des droits et libertés.

February 4-6, 2011, Concordia University, Hall Building, Montreal

Programme: www.peoplescommission.org/en/forum

Promotional video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0S0I5QYMgw

Podcast (French, English and Spanish): www.peoplescommission.org/en/forum/audio.php

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