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## Shed a tear for Canada: Trudeau

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Alexandre Trudeau is passionate in his critique of the subject of his next documentary, the federal security certificates under which five terrorism suspects have been in jail for about the last five years.

Two of them have gone on hunger strikes, evoking media memories of the 1981 prison hunger strike of Irish republican Bobby Sands who died after 66 days.

A more contemporary comparison would be with that of the recent 70-day hunger strike by Iranian journalist Akbar Ganji in Tehran's infamous Evin prison, the same place where Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was killed.

Ganji has been in jail since April 2000 for exposing the murderous activities of the ruling mullahs. In June, he stopped eating in protest against, among other things, his solitary confinement and the refusal of officials to let him see his wife and family. In mid-July he had to be rushed to hospital where, a month later, under circumstances not known to the public, he broke his fast.

At the Metro Detention centre, today is the 77th day of Mohamed Mahjoub's hunger strike. Last week, another detainee, Hassan Almrei, ended his after 73 days. Mahjoub has been under arrest since June 2000, Almrei since Oct. 2001, both under solitary confinement.

Their hunger strikes were not so much to highlight their detention, which they are fighting in court, but to protest their prison conditions.

Mahjoub wants a medical checkup for his injured knee and failing eyes. He wants to be treated for the hepatitis C that he contracted in jail. On Tuesday, when he was rushed to hospital to be monitored for the effects of his fasting, he was *not* checked for his other ailments.

He also wants to be able to see his three children without being separated by a Plexiglas partition.

Almrei fasted to be allowed an hour, not just 20 minutes, of fresh air and exercise a day. All their requests have been rejected. Is this really happening in Canada?

Earlier, Almrei's lawyers had to fight in court to get him winter clothing and shoes for his cold cell.

"When I met Hassan," Trudeau told a rally earlier this month, "he held up a pair of \$2 Chinese shoes and said it took \$130,000 of taxpayers' money to get him to get those."

This really happened in Canada?

Set aside the arguments over the security certificates that allow Ottawa to deport non-citizens for alleged ties to terrorism, without ever fully disclosing, to the public or even the accused, the reasons for doing so.

Forget whether these five men should be deported to countries where they may face torture.

Forget also whether they are as dangerous as Ottawa says they are. The courts will decide that.

Still, how would Canada's security be compromised if Almrei gets more exercise or Mahjoub gets medical treatment and embraces his kids?

The answer lies in Canada's Kafka-esque bureaucracy — or worse, Trudeau says. The detention centre is a maximum-security provincial institution meant to hold people up to two years less a day. It does not allow the activities these men are asking for. For that, they need to get to a federal prison. But they cannot be sent there because they have not been convicted because they have not been charged.

"It is one thing to say we need to hold them because they are a threat to national security; it's another to be punitive with them," Trudeau told me.

"Why did Hassan have to spend two winters without footwear? He could have died of hypothermia. Why can't he walk an hour a day? No security requires him not to.

"Why can't Mahjoub get treatment? He may die in a Canadian jail ... The logic may well be that such harsh conditions are an encouragement for them to voluntarily agree to deportation."

This is precisely what is done in the United States. Hundreds held on suspicion of terrorism but found to have had no such connection, and get charged with petty immigration violations instead, agree to voluntary deportation.

In fact, that's what happened in Toronto when 22 Pakistani young men were rounded up in 2002 but none was charged with any terrorism offences, only immigration violations. Many just left.

Trudeau feels this is what Ottawa is hoping for with the jailed five.

Or, less likely, Ottawa may be dragging on the high-profile cases for the benefit of the U.S. "All of this might be a lot of show, of doing our part (in the war on terrorism), and our proof is the Toronto Detention Centre."

Either way, he said, "the reality is terrible; it is gruesome," and it "puts Canada in a new league" — where it should not be.

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