

Rally planned to support Algerian refugee claimant

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As he enters his fourth year living in the rectory of a Point St. Charles church, a failed Algerian refugee claimant says he hasn't given up hope that one day he will be given the legal right to remain in Canada.

Abelkader Belaoui, who is blind and has diabetes, took sanctuary in St. Gabriel's church in January 2006 after losing his bid for refugee status and failing to get a reprieve on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

"I have a lot of support in the community and people send me money for food," he said in a telephone interview.

Supporters of Belaoui will hold a rally on the grounds of the Catholic church at 1 p.m. on Saturday. They will then march through the streets of Point St. Charles, calling on Immigration Minister Jason Kenney to use his discretionary power to grant the Algerian refugee status.

Belaoui said he will step outside the church briefly during the rally to thank his supporters.

Belaoui said he passes the time with visitors and by playing music. He said he has received a job offer from a centre in Côte des Neiges that offers support to immigrant workers.

"I speak three languages and I can help them," said Belaoui, who has a local radio show on a community radio station and is making his second album.

Belaoui, 41, left Algeria for the United States in 1996, at the height of the civil war in his native country. He lived in the U.S. for years after his tourist visa expired. He came to Canada in 2003 after receiving a letter from U.S. immigration officials asking him to attend a "removal hearing."

Nora Butler-Burke, a supporter of Belaoui, said she and Belaoui's many friends will continue to battle on his behalf.

"There is a strong base of support for him," she said.

