

Comité de soutien d'
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DIGNITÉ POUR ABDELKADER



PRESS RELEASE

Non-status man marks two year anniversary in church sanctuary 'Two years too many' campaign launched to support status for Abdelkader Belaoui

Montreal, 4 January 2008—A non-status man's struggle to remain in Canada in defiance of a deportation order has entered its third year. Mr. Abdelkader Belaoui took refuge in St. Gabriel's church in Montreal on 1 January 2006, after his applications to remain in Canada were rejected. The 40-year old has been unable to leave the church precincts ever since for fear of being arrested and deported.

Under the slogan "Two Years Too Many", Mr. Belaoui and his supporters are coordinating a month-long campaign to mark the second year anniversary. The campaign will climax on January 18th, when groups across the country and around the world will participate in an international Day of Action in support of Mr. Belaoui's case.

On January 26th, a cabaret-style concert will be held in St. Gabriel's church to express community support for Mr. Belaoui. A photo exhibit of Mr. Belaoui's struggle, "704: Still here/Toujours là", currently showing in the offices of the Community Legal Services of Point St-Charles in Mr. Belaoui's neighbourhood, will be auctioned at the concert (the photos can be viewed at www.tatianagomez.net/kb2/).

"Why has he been forced to live in virtual imprisonment in a church for over two years? For the 'crime' of insisting on his right to live in dignity and without fear," said Nora Butler-Burke, a member of his support committee.

In 1996, along with many thousands of others, Mr. Belaoui fled the political instability and violence of Algeria's civil war, in which hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed.

After his refugee application was rejected by an Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) Commissioner who refused 99% of the cases before him in a two-year period, Mr. Belaoui sought support from his member of Parliament. Her aide advised him that, as a blind man, he would never be accepted by Canada. The message was two-fold: as a blind man he would be considered incapable; and Canada would evaluate him according to market worth, not human dignity.

Mr. Belaoui's application for permanent resident status in Canada was subsequently rejected in a decision which entirely failed to take Mr. Belaoui's blindness into account in its assessment of his integration. The Quebec Civil Liberties Union (La Ligue des droits et libertés) has qualified the decision as discriminatory against Mr. Belaoui as a blind man.

Like many facing deportation from Canada, Mr. Belaoui felt that he had no choice but to defy the deportation order that would send him to a country he hasn't lived in for over a decade. Neither returning to Algeria nor leading a precarious underground life in Canada were realistic options for him as a blind person. Instead, Mr. Belaoui took the courageous step of going public, taking a stand for human dignity and becoming a rallying point for the struggle of immigrants in Canada.

Over the past two years, support for Mr. Belaoui has snowballed. Community organizations in Mr. Belaoui's neighbourhood of Montreal have joined with national organizations to offer tangible support and appeal to the Minister of Immigration to regularize his status. Five individuals have come forward to offer Mr. Belaoui a financial sponsorship. His own member of Parliament, Thierry St-Cyr (Bloc Québécois), as well as MPs from all four federal parties, including Norman Doyle, the Conservative Chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, have intervened with the Minister on Mr. Belaoui's behalf. Countless individuals have signed petitions, written letters, taken part in community events, delegations, pickets, and marches as well as provided for daily needs in the church. Most recently, over 100 individuals, including well-known Québécois figures such as Richard Desjardins and Édith Butler, signed a Christmas appeal to the Prime Minister to intervene in favour of Mr. Belaoui.

Increasing numbers of people across Canada are taking refuge in churches or gurdwaras after being threatened with deportation. In 2007, three such cases were resolved.

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For interviews: 514 578-0837 (fr/en) or 514 998 1857 (en)

Background: www.soutienpourkader.net

CBC Current documentary (re-broadcast 23 Aug 2007): www.cbc.ca/thecurrent

Radio Canada Dimanche Magazine (broadcast 16 Sept 2007): www.radio-canada.ca/actualite/v2/dimanchemag