

# Asylum-seeker facing long wait

## Deportation deadline passes

Algerian man determined to stay in church sanctuary

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THE GAZETTE

Abdelkader Belaoui says he is tired and his diabetes is acting up under the strain of his stand-off with federal immigration authorities.

But the Algerian-born refugee claimant still defied a federal immigration order to report yesterday to the Canada Border Services Agency for deportation.

The 38-year-old Muslim, who is blind and on welfare, refuses to budge from the Roman Catholic church in Point St. Charles that has offered him sanctuary since New Year's Day.

"I will stay here for as long as it takes Immigration Minister Joe Volpe to find a solution, once and for all, that allows me to get on with my life," said Belaoui, who has taken refuge at St. Gabriel's Church presbytery on Centre St.

Robert Gervais, a spokesperson for the Canada Border Services Agency, which enforces deportation orders, declined yesterday to discuss Belaoui's case, citing privacy reasons.

Gervais also refused to say whether an arrest warrant for Belaoui has been issued.

"Generally, an arrest warrant is issued if we are convinced the person did not present themselves intentionally, and did not plan to abide by Canadian law," he noted.

Belaoui came to Canada in March 2003 after spending about seven years in the United States.

His claim for refugee status here was turned down by the Immigration and Refugee Board in October, and he was ordered to report yesterday with two pieces of luggage and his travel documents ready for deportation.

A refugee claimant who arrives in Canada from the United States via a land route — as Belaoui did — is usually deported back to the U.S., Gervais noted.

Belaoui says he is encouraged in his refusal to leave Canada by the support of community organizations, refugee rights groups, and his local MP, Liza Frulla, who visited him this week at the church.

Frulla, who is also minister of Canadian heritage, has asked Public Safety Minister Anne McLellan to find a way to delay Belaoui's deportation, pending a review of his case, a spokesperson said.



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Assisted by friend Guylaine Racine, Abdelkader Belaoui makes his way through the presbytery of St. Gabriel's Church, where he has sought sanctuary rather than report to federal officials for deportation. Belaoui says he's willing to remain there indefinitely.

"She cannot do anything more than that," said Jean-François Del Torchio, Frulla's press secretary.

It was a much-needed shot in the arm for Belaoui, who says he feels safe in the church.

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rested," he said. "Frulla said no one would arrest me here."

But he could be facing a long wait.

In 2005, two families offered sanctuary in Montreal churches won reprieves from Citizenship and Immigration Canada only

after living more than a year under a church roof.

Palestinian refugees Khalil Ayoub, his brother Nabih, and Nabih's wife, Thérèse Boulos Haddad, spent 13 months in the basement of Église Notre Dame de Grâce before their deportation order was lifted in February on humanitarian grounds.

That same month, Colombian refugee claimant Alvar Vega and his family left the sanctuary of St. Andrew's-Norwood United Church in St. Laurent for the first time in 19 months after immigration authorities halted their deportation proceedings.

Belaoui says he is hopeful he will not be sheltering at St. Gabriel's this time next year.

"I have a feeling the minister will find a solution.

"I just don't know when."

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