



PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

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## Refugee board denies Algerian right to stay for second time

'IT LOOKS LIKE FEDS ARE SENDING MESSAGE'

Second recent case in which claimant who took sanctuary in church has been turned down

CHERYL CORNACCHIA  
THE GAZETTE

Refugee claimants facing deportation from Canada have for years used church sanctuary to buy time and, in most cases, win the right to stay in the country.

But it now appears that avenue to Canadian citizenship – taken by at least 261 refugees from 1983 to 2003 – is being closed by the Conservative government.

Abdelkader Belaoui, a blind Algerian who sought refuge in a Montreal church eight months ago, has, for the second time, been denied the right to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board in Montreal refused Belaoui's claim.

His case is the second Canadian case in as many months where a refugee claimant who used church sanctuary has been turned down.

A Russian family who avoided

deportation by seeking refuge in a Newfoundland church in October 2005 has also seen their application to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds refused.

"It looks like the government is sending a message that this (method) isn't going to work anymore," said Jared Will, Belaoui's Montreal lawyer.

Will cited data collected by University of Windsor, Ont., professor Randy Lippert in a just-released book on the use of church sanctuary and Canadian immigration policy.

Lippert found that from 1983 to 2003 – with the exception of only two – all refugee claimants who were in church sanctuary were eventually accepted into Canada.

There has been no formal announcement of a change in federal government policy, Will said, but it appears Ottawa is testing out a hardline approach on sanctuary-seekers.

Belaoui has five Montrealers

ready to sponsor him financially, including a priest and a university professor.

More than 50 community and human rights groups as well as individuals have written letters on his behalf.

Instead, Will said, the written decision from Immigration Canada notes that Belaoui can return to Algeria because his life is not at risk there.

The decision fails to address the hardship that Belaoui, a blind and diabetic man who has put down roots in Canada, would face if he has to move back to Algeria, said Will.

Belaoui was ordered to report to Canadian immigration authorities in Montreal but refused to appear late last week.

He plans to file a request to be heard by the Federal Court by the end of the month.

Jim McDonald, the parish priest at St. Gabriel's, the Point St. Charles church giving Belaoui refuge, said supporters are also waiting on a reply from federal Immigration Minister Monte Solberg.

"We've requested a chance to sit down and talk to him about the case," McDonald said.

ccornacchia@  
thegazette.canwest.com