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Sanctuary! Blind-sided  
Richard Burnett,  
*The Hour Magazine*  
January 5th, 2006

Belaouni (L) marches from Montreal to Ottawa during last summer's Solidarity Across Borders eight-day march in support of non-status refugees and immigrants photo: Photo courtesy Solidarity Across Borders

In a move that's being denounced by immigration activists, Citizenship and Immigration Canada is ringing in the new year by deporting 38-year-old blind Algerian national Abdelkader Belaouni because Belaouni - like 90 Per cent of all blind people in Canada - cannot find a job.

Belaouni, scheduled to be deported Jan. 5, has taken sanctuary in Montreal's St-Gabriel's Church and will remain there until Canada grants him permanent residency or authorities raid the church.

"The tradition of sanctuary is not a legal tradition," says Samir Shaheen-Hussain of the Committee to Support Abdelkader Belaounin, which has received 32 letters of support from reputable organizations such as the Committee to Aid Refugees and Montreal City Mission.

Belaouni was first displaced in Algeria during that country's civil war, then left post-9/11 America where he experienced the backlash against Arabs and Muslims. Belaouni came to Montreal, which has a vibrant Algerian community. But last October 24, the CIC rejected Belaouni's application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. If deported, he will be sent back to the States where there is a high risk of detention pending deportation back to Algeria.

For now, Belaouni is safe inside St-Gabriel's. "He seems to be in good spirits," says Shaheen-Hussain. "Community members are providing him with food, visit him, help with day-to-day tasks, and give him moral support."

Shaheen-Hussain, also a spokesperson for immigration-rights group Solidarity Across Borders (SAB), says, "Belaouni is the victim of double discrimination - being blind makes it hard to find work, and not having status makes it doubly hard."

Which is why during the current federal election campaign SAB is lobbying for the regularization of all non-status people. Challenging federal Immigration Minister Joe Volpe - who has stated "Canada is desperate for immigration" - SAB asks, "Why do upwards of 400,000 people continue to live miserable lives underground in Canada without status? Why has Canada not lived up to its obligation to implement an appeal procedure at the Immigrant and Refugee Board?"

The answers may come too late for Abdelkader Belaouni. But as St-Gabriel's Father MacDonald says, "It is compassionate justice that we are looking for, as opposed to any kind of legalistic justice."

Send letters of support for Belaouni to Immigration Minister Joe Volpe at [volpej@parl.gc.ca](mailto:volpej@parl.gc.ca) and [minister@cic.gc.ca](mailto:minister@cic.gc.ca), or fax Volpe at (613) 992-9791



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January 5th, 2006

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Richard Burnett

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**photo: Photo courtesy Solidarity Across Borders**



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[Other weeks...](#)**Blind Man**

I feel like we're being made to feel bad for Belaouni because he's blind. Yes, it's a sad reality that life is a bit more difficult for him than most of us because of his situation, therefore making it hard to find a job, etc, but if the CIC denied him status, they must have good reason. Or at least I hope they do.

I know often enough that when I visit government offices, they drive me insane, and always seem like they need to make me nervous and test my patience. Just a couple of weeks ago when I went to pick up my passport and didn't bring a piece of ID with me, they wanted to refuse me access to my passport. I had the bill with the reference number, my name, and all the relevant information, but they absolutely wanted to see a piece of ID. It's not enough that just the previous week, I had come myself in person with all the ID requirements and documents needed, and now here I was, wanting to simply show my bill and get my ID, and they had to make me sick over it. Needless to say, after a nice, well-justified argument, I got my passport and all was well. Of course Belaouni can't do the same, but my point is that sometimes government offices act like they enjoy making things a little more difficult for people just to show that they're in charge, and you better provide if you want to get anywhere.

That's why I hope that the CIC denied this guy status on valid grounds. I also don't fully agree with the other standpoint though. I mean, not every refugee that flees to Montreal can be accepted with open arms. Nor should they be. Then it'd be far too dangerous to the city of Montreal, if they let anyone in. Who knows who you're letting in, why they're here, what their motives are. It's a sad situation, but I feel like we're made to pity this guy more because he's blind. And maybe we should. I mean there's no doubt that it's harder to find a job anywhere when you're blind. I'm very split on the issue. They should first run more background checks on the man though.

[Vanessa Hasid](#)

{ 11 votes }

January 14th, 2006

**The Law: Sanctuary**

This began in early Roman history. The prosecutor, Saul, a Jew in the employ of the Roman empire began service as a pro bono attorney for early Christians under the name of Paul. He was later called Saint Paul. As Paul was traveling about his business as a pro bono attorney a huge mob was raised. This mob wished to kill him.

The CITY CLERK confronted the mob, saying "We shall be held responsible for this riotous conduct." It was the CITY CLERK who granted Sanctuary to Paul.

The foundation of the concept of Sanctuary is not religious in nature although its most famous instance, the case of Paul, might be viewed as a religious incident. The Sanctuary was granted by the City Clerk in this case although in Communist China he would have been referred to as the Humble Administrator. It was his responsibility to maintain order for the proceedings of the government to be legal. Fortunately for Paul his was able to act as his own attorney in the following proceeding.

Now, we face much hatred of Arabs. Formations of mobs and riotous conduct have become standard. It is the responsibility of the City Clerk to maintain the protection of a blind middle easterner. Not for religious reasons but for reasons of social responsibility and the mainenance of public order.

Much needs to be done to reinstate a rule of law and this case is one. Mr. Belaouni is unable to get his legal documents and I have the same problem. We are in different countries with different clerks, different police, different ministers but he evil is unrelenting. In California we have mass graves like those discovered in British Columbia. Even the famous FBI agent, Deep Throat, who was instrumental in the Watergate Impeachment has come to care for Mr. Belaouni's plight.

He doesn't move without good cause, justifiable in the law, and knows how dangerous is the terrain he is treading.

[Sheila Knight](#)

January 26th, 2006

### **Blind to the facts**

I am curious about the background of this situation.

We are told that Abdelkader Belaouni is blind...

Ok... fine. That sucks.

But is it a reason to keep someone in Canada? There are lots of blind people all over the world. Do we let them all in?

If he wasn't blind, would it be ok to deport him then?

Where is he from? Why is he here? Is he here cause here for a chance, or is he here just for our free health care?

Not everything is black and white. It is easy to feel sorry for the "blind guy". But that is in itself discrimination. I would like to hear the rest of this story.

[Eric Wilson](#)

{ 1 vote }

January 5th, 2006

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