

Press Release

Abdelkader Belaouni launches a new appeal sponsored by five individuals

Montreal, April 25, 2006 – Abdelkader Belaouni and his support committee are offering the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration a solution to Mr. Belaouni's situation, which has dragged on since Mr. Belaouni took sanctuary in St. Gabriel's Church in Point St. Charles almost four months ago. A new application for permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds has just been submitted, offering new elements for the evaluation of the claim. In addition, five Canadian citizens have come forward to sponsor Mr. Belaouni, guaranteeing his economic support.

Mr. Belaouni and his support committee are asking that Minister Solberg consider this solution as soon as possible in order to regularize Mr. Belaouni's situation. The solution responds to the grounds on which Citizenship and Immigration Canada refused Mr. Belaouni's first application for residency in 2005; that is, lack of integration in employment and the absence of family support in Canada.

The new file details the multiple obstacles that Mr. Belaouni faced while trying to find employment in Canada, due to physical handicaps. It also shows the efforts he made to improve his employment prospects and the potential he has to integrate into the job market (volunteer experience and orientation courses for the blind).

According to the *Ligue des droits et libertés* (Quebec Civil Liberties Union), the failure to consider the structural barriers that Mr. Belaouni faces in finding employment in his claim for residency amounts to discrimination, and is a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, the barriers to access to training programs that Mr. Belaouni experienced must also be taken into account, as summarized in a Canadian government report : "To participate fully in the job market, handicapped people must have access to the necessary tools for their success – such as access to training, apprenticeship, and upgrade programmes in the workplace." However, Belaouni attempted many times to participate in job training and internship programs with *Emploi-Québec*, but, because he didn't have Canadian residency status, he was not eligible.

Sponsorship

The sponsorship responds to the concern about family support. Five individuals have formally committed to take on the de facto role of family by lending their economic support to Belaouni. Mr. Belaouni's five sponsors are: Father James Macdonald, a priest at St-Gabriel's church; Ian Ilavsky, the co-founder of Constellation Records; Pierre Dongier, a medical doctor; Marc Champagne, a friend of Belaouni's and a Point St-Charles resident; and Guylaine Racine, a professor in the school of social work at the University of Montreal.

Abdelkader Belaouni's application for residency is supported by over 50 organizations, including the Ligue des droits et libertés, Amnesty International, and a large number of groups from the Point St-Charles neighborhood, where Mr. Belaouni was living and found sanctuary. The support committee for Abdelkader Belaouni has written letters to Minister Solberg on several occasions, telephoned him, and even traveled to Ottawa without receiving a response from him. The support committee is aware that the Minister is able to respond rapidly, as he has done so in the case of a Belgian farming family in Ontario who refused deportation with the support of their local farming association.

Belaouni's four long months in sanctuary, with his life in suspension, has been difficult and has already had health consequences since he suffers from diabetes. Abdelkader Belaouni, his support committee, the Ligue des droits et libertes, as well as his sponsors and the many organizations that support him hope that Minister Solberg will show humanity and accept the solution proposed so that Abdelkader Belaouni can live in dignity in Canada and contribute meaningfully to society.

-30-

The Committee to Support Abdelkader Belaouni, tel : 514-222-0205

Ligue des droits et libertés, tel. : 514-849-7717