

CANADA'S PM IS INDIFFERENT BECAUSE OMAR KHADR IS A MUSLIM [By Dr. Mohamed Elmasry]

In November 2000 British engineer Christopher Rodway was killed and his wife injured when a bomb destroyed their car in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A week later, another bomb injured Britons Mark Paine and Steve Coughlan.

Then in February 2001, William Sampson, a Canadian citizen who had been working in Saudi Arabia, along with Briton Alexander Mitchell and Belgian Raf Schyvens appeared on Saudi television, after being arrested and reportedly having confessed to the November 2000 car bombings. They were all charged with murder.

Sampson claimed throughout that he had been tortured and was innocent. The Canadian government acted and began pressuring the Saudi government to release Sampson. In May 2001, Crown Prince Abdullah (the current Saudi king) postponed a trip to Canada to protest the Canadian torture allegations.

The Canadian government nevertheless maintained diplomatic pressure, until in August 2003 William Sampson was finally released from prison, after being granted clemency by former Saudi King Fahd which absolved him from the murder charges.

Shortly after his release, Sampson wrote "Confessions of an Innocent Man" in which he was very critical of the Canadian government for not acting quickly enough, or doing enough, to secure his release. Sampson described having spent 963 days in solitary confinement, during which he was subjected to torture, including weeks of sleep deprivation, until he was desperate enough to "confess" to criminal acts he had not committed.

With the recent release of video excerpts of the interrogation of Omar Khadr, millions now know that Khadr, a Canadian citizen, was abused by his American captors at Guantanamo Bay where, he's spent more than 2500 days without charge. He was also kept in solitary and deprived of sleep for weeks at a time. The Canadian government had full knowledge of this abusive treatment as far back as 2003, yet assured citizens all that time that Khadr (then still a teenaged minor) was being "treated humanely."

The latest revelations about Khadr's treatment while in U.S. custody should be enough to move the Conservative government to bring Khadr home immediately to face democratic justice, says Alex Neve of Amnesty International Canada. "The fact that [the video] revelations don't automatically, finally, lead to the government's agreeing to seek his

repatriation frankly defies belief,” he said.

Khadr is accused of killing an American soldier in Afghanistan when he was only 15. He faces a "military commission" in October that even the U.S. Supreme Court has found to be gravely flawed.

A Canadian Federal Court judge ruled just last month that Khadr's treatment at the hands of the U.S. military has violated clear international laws against torture.

The United Nations has also raised concerns about setting an international precedent by trying Khadr as an adult for alleged "war crimes" committed when he was a child.

Foreign Affairs Department reports say Canadian official Jim Gould visited Khadr in 2004 at Guantanamo. While there, Gould was briefed by the U.S. military on Khadr's treatment. One of the reports says Khadr was purposely deprived of sleep and moved every three hours for 21 days to make him more pliable for interrogation.

Human rights advocates and opposition politicians have all urged the Canadian government to take prompt action in securing Khadr's release, yet Prime Minister Stephen Harper has shown shocking indifference to rising calls by Canadians to bring Khadr home to face justice. Harper claims his government has "no real alternative" to the U.S. legal process in this case.

Khadr's Canadian lawyer Dennis Edney calls Harper's comments "disingenuous," while University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran maintains that the prime minister could have had Khadr released from Guantanamo Bay with a single phone call. "Without exception, every other leader of a Western country has gotten their citizens out of Guantanamo," Prof. Attaran said.

"What is being done to Omar Khadr right now rests squarely on the shoulders of Prime Minister Harper," added Navy Lt.-Cmdr. William Kuebler, Khadr's U.S. military attorney. In fact, Kuebler accused the Canadian government of knowingly hiding behind false U.S. assurances regarding the detainees' treatment in allowing Khadr to be held at Guantanamo Bay in the first place.

And why is Stephen Harper so callously indifferent to Omar Khadr's case?

It's painfully obvious: William Sampson is a white Westerner, while his fellow Canadian citizen, Omar Khadr, is brown-skinned ...and a Muslim.

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