

Muslim leader in Michigan detained by US officials

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The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has arrested and is detaining Rabih Haddad, a native of Lebanon and prominent member of the Arab-American community in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Haddad, 41, is being held indefinitely and without bond for allegedly overstaying his tourist visa. INS agents arrested him in his home last Friday in front of his frightened wife and children, who were not told where he was being taken or why.

Haddad, who came to the US in 1998, has participated in local town hall meetings on Middle Eastern issues and has joined panel discussions at the University of Michigan, including a recent talk on the consequences of the war in Afghanistan. He is the Assistant Imam of the Ann Arbor Islamic Center, has given introductory classes on Islam at the university and has been active in inter-faith activities to promote better relations between religious communities.

Haddad is also a co-founder and board of trustee member of the Global Relief Foundation (GRF), whose Illinois offices were raided on Friday by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The Bush administration has charged that the Muslim charity organization—which sent \$4 million last year to Palestinian refugee camps as well as hospitals, orphanages and food programs in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Kosovo and Chechnya—has connections to Hamas or other organizations deemed as terrorist by the US government.

According to a report in the *Detroit Free Press*, NATO-led peacekeepers and United Nations police who raided two GRF offices in Yugoslavia last week said the group is suspected of supporting worldwide terrorist activities and was planning attacks in the US and Europe. The organization's representatives have denied these unsubstantiated charges and have noted

that the Clinton administration investigated the charity in December 1999 and found no links to terrorist organizations.

Federal officials seized computers, files and records from the organization's offices in Bridgeview, Illinois and raided the home of the group's executive director. They also froze \$600,000 in assets, including about \$200,000 in checks that had come in during the past week. Muslims traditionally donate money near the end of Ramadan, the holy month that ended Saturday.

The US government recently raided the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, the largest Muslim charity organization, after similar accusations. The raids were carried out in accordance with the USA Patriot Act, signed by Bush in October, which allows the president to “confiscate any property... of any foreign person, foreign organization or foreign country that he determines has planned, authorized, aided or engaged in ... attacks against the United States.” Under the law the government does not have to provide any evidence of such ties and the burden of proof that they have no links to terrorism lies with the organizations themselves.

Over the past months, GRF has focused on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Haddad has played a prominent role in these recent relief efforts, and has made several statements urging greater attention be paid to the conditions faced by the thousands of refugees uprooted by the American bombing campaign and the previous civil war.

Haddad was arrested the day before Eid, a holiday marking the end of Ramadan and one of the holiest days of the year for Muslims. Three INS agents handcuffed Rabih in front of his wife and four children, aged 3 to 11, in a scene which one supporter compared to American children watching their father being taken

away from them on Christmas Eve. For 48 hours neither his family nor his lawyer were informed of where he was being held, on what grounds, or when he would be released. He was unable to contact his lawyer until Sunday, after it was revealed that he was being held in an INS detention facility in Monroe County, a long distance from his home. His wife was not able to contact him by telephone until Monday.

Haddad has been refused bond on the basis that he is a flight risk. He has been charged with only a minor visa violation. His wife, Salma Al-Rashaid, disputed this charge as well, saying they both had applied for permanent residency in accordance with the Lise Act of 2000. It is not generally INS policy to pursue such previous violations while applications are still pending. To detain a person without bond on such charges is rare if not unprecedented, according to civil liberties advocates.

The arrest and detention of Haddad has sparked widespread concern over the continuing assault on civil liberties by the Bush administration. As of Monday afternoon, 1,627 residents had signed a petition in Ann Arbor expressing concern over Haddad's detention.

Haddad's wife spoke at a press conference organized by local civil rights and Muslim organizations on Tuesday. "When he was arrested," Salma Al-Rashaid stated, "I couldn't believe my eyes. The timing was even worse: this was just before our holiest day of the year." In response to questions directed to her concerning the GRF, she noted, "From the moment it opened, the FBI visited it. But they found nothing. The building has no linkage to terrorists. I don't know why the government says it does. It is difficult to know something and to watch the media report something else."

The legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan, Michael Steinberg, also spoke at the conference. He connected Haddad's arrest to the attack on democratic rights being carried out as the FBI conducts thousands of "voluntary" interviews of Muslim men, many of whom live in the Detroit and Ann Arbor area.

Taurus Colvin, a member of the board of trustees of the Islamic Center of Ann Arbor, spoke to the *WSWS* about the nature of these interviews, which have only recently begun. He noted that those interviewed are asked detailed questions about their political

associations and those of their friends and whether they have views opposing the American government. "The purpose of this is to let us know that we are being watched, that the FBI is on our tail. It's harassment and the invasion of privacy." Those who do not agree to be interviewed or are uncooperative are subject to harassment and, like Haddad, persecution by the INS.

Colvin also said the Muslim community in Ann Arbor had been subjected to surveillance and FBI harassment even before the terror attacks.

Since September 11, Arabs, Muslims and immigrants have been subject to broad attacks on their civil liberties. In addition to the FBI interviews, over a thousand individuals have been detained, many of them held incommunicado. Most of these individuals have been rounded up on the basis of minor immigration violations or with no charges being brought against them. The government has passed legislation that broadly extends its ability to detain individuals indefinitely, to monitor conversations between detainees and their lawyers, and to try individuals in closed courts.

Several of the speakers at the conference noted the effect this dragnet has had on the attitude of many Arab-Americans toward the government. Kenan Basha, vice president of the Muslim Student Association at the University of Michigan, noted that 60 to 70 Middle Eastern students at the school received letters from the FBI requesting interviews. "Many students came here in search of the American dream," he said. "They escaped repressive governments. They cherished American democracy, but all that changed on September 11 when they were incriminated on the basis of ethnicity."

The ACLU representative likened the gross violations of democratic rights being carried out by the American government today to McCarthyism. He said Ashcroft and other Bush administration officials were not only cracking down on those of Middle Eastern origin, but were suggesting all dissent was equivalent to supporting terrorism.



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