

Deportation proceedings against family of Michigan Muslim leader

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In the latest attack by the US government on Muslim cleric Rabih Haddad, his wife and children have now received letters stating deportation proceedings have been initiated against them.

Haddad is presently being held in custody in Chicago on a minor visa violation. He is a popular Muslim cleric in Ann Arbor, Michigan and was cofounder of one of the major Islamic charities in the US, Global Relief Foundation (GRF). Only one child, American-born Rami, 8 years old, has been spared the threatened removal from the US.

Rabih Haddad was arrested on December 14, the same day that agents from the FBI and the US Treasury Department raided the Chicago offices of GRF. Haddad co-founded the charity and is a member of its board of directors.

Haddad's treatment at the hands of the authorities has been unprecedented for someone ostensibly charged with a visa violation. Haddad was held incommunicado for the first 48 hours after his arrest, with his family and lawyers denied information as to his whereabouts. He was then denied bail by a local immigration judge. The hearings were closed to the public, denying access to the proceedings for his family, supporters and the media.

Haddad has not been allowed to attend his own hearings, viewing them instead via closed-circuit television, and has been held in solitary confinement. On January 11, without warning or notification to his family, he was moved to Chicago by federal US Marshals to testify before a federal grand jury convened to investigate GRF.

Salma Al-Rushaid, Haddad's wife, received the deportation notices the weekend of January 18, one month after agents from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) arrested her husband. Al-Rushaid has become an active spokesperson against the injustices being carried out against her husband, suggesting that the government's actions against this family are not only discriminatory, but vindictive as well. The INS letters reportedly indicate a deportation hearing has yet to be scheduled for her and the children.

Lawyers and supporters of Haddad believe the real reason he is being targeted is because of his relationship with Global Relief. On December 14, the same day Haddad was arrested, the FBI and agents from the US Treasury Department raided the Chicago offices of GRF, carted away files and closed the bank accounts of the charity. The Bush administration claims the aid organization—which collected \$4 million last year that went to

hospitals, orphanages and food programs—has connections to terrorists and funds their efforts.

The arrest of Haddad and the raid on GRF is part of a vendetta by the Bush administration against all Islamic relief organizations. The Islamic web site *islam.about.com* stated that with the closure of GRF and Benefit International Foundation the government has “effectively shut down *all* major Islamic charitable outlets in the United States.” Previously, the Bush administration raided and froze the assets of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), the third of the three largest and most respected Islamic charities operating in the US. All three organizations are registered as non-profit organizations and reportedly have been cooperating with government officials and providing voluntary interviews. All have vehemently denied any ties to terrorism.

The timing of the raids was designed to prevent the normal charitable contributions raised at the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims traditionally make sizeable annual donations.

Haddad is now in Chicago, where he is expected to testify before the federal grand jury investigating GRF. Lawyers for GRF said the organization has always been scrupulous about where money is sent. Several GRF members have already been interviewed. In 1999, the Clinton administration investigated the organization and found no links to groups the US has deemed terrorist.

Two lawsuits were filed this week citing the denial of democratic procedures in the case. One has been filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of news organizations and a US congressman, and another by the *Detroit Free Press*. The lawsuits raise constitutional issues that go beyond the guilt or innocence of Haddad and GRF. Both lawsuits challenge the constitutionality of holding immigration hearings in secrecy.

“Under settled First Amendment law, there is a strong presumption that court proceedings must be open to the public and members of the press,” stated Steven R. Shapiro, legal director of the national ACLU, in a press release. “The Justice Department's policy of blanket secrecy is unconstitutional and incompatible with the values of a free society.” The lawsuit was filed on behalf of the *Detroit News*, the weekly *Metro Times* and US Representative John Conyers, Democrat from Michigan.

The suit filed by the *Detroit Free Press* names US Attorney General John Ashcroft, US Chief Immigration Judge Michael Creppy and US Immigration Judge Elizabeth Hacker as

defendants, demanding an injunction to give access to future court hearings related to Haddad, transcripts of the previous hearings and all documents related to the case.

Arguing that the September 11 terrorist attack should not result in the loss of freedoms, *Free Press* Managing Editor Carole Leigh Hutton wrote, “Even the most serious and sensitive cases can’t be conducted in secrecy,” according to the US Constitution.

At least two members of Congress have raised concerns about the abuse of democratic procedures by the Bush administration. Lynn Rivers, congresswoman from Ann Arbor, said Haddad’s rights as an individual are guaranteed under the 14th Amendment, which says “all persons,” not just US citizens, are entitled to a fair trial.

Since September 11, the Bush administration has detained and arrested more than a thousand Arab and Muslim men and has identified for deportation 6,000 individuals with visa violations. When the government announced in December plans to interview 5,000 Middle Eastern immigrants it was reported that over 500 of these potential interviewees reside in Metropolitan Detroit, an area with the largest Arab population in the country.

Referring to the Haddad case, Phillis Engelbert of the Ann Arbor Friends Service Committee told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I think this is outrageous. It is designed to harass and create a climate of fear. There is absolutely no basis in national security for removing Mrs. Haddad and her children. I think most people recognize that it is a transparent attempt to frighten an entire population.”

Ms. Engelbert said the family filed together for permanent residency in April 2001. “Her status is the same as her husband,” Engelbert said, who has traveled with Al Rushaid as she has spoken out against the unjust treatment of her husband. The fact that Al-Rushaid was sent a deportation letter points to inconsistencies in the government’s dealings with immigrants, she added.

According to records provided to the media by Haddad’s attorney, Ashraf Nubani, Haddad has been in and out of the US since 1980, last entering the country on a tourist visa in 1998. The visa expired in August 1999. To correct their status, the Haddad’s filed for permanent residency before the April 30, 2001 deadline stipulated under the LIFE Act (Legal Immigration and Family Equity Act), a provision passed by Congress that allows foreign residents who are in violation of their visa to pay a \$1,000 fine to stay in the US while their request is processed.

Customarily, violations of this nature have been considered minor, especially if the persons involved are applying for legal status. However, following the September 11 attack and the proclaimed war on terrorism, the Bush administration has used the crisis to justify an assault on the democratic rights of immigrants.

The *WSWS* spoke to Nizah Hassan, vice president of the Muslim Community Association (MCA) of Ann Arbor, who was incensed over the deportation proceedings against the Haddad family. “We don’t know why the INS is choosing to pursue this case,” he said. “It is totally unfounded.” Hassan said the measures being pursued by the government are alienating the Muslim community unnecessarily. “We just don’t know what they are thinking.”

According to Hassan, Haddad was the primary public voice of

the Muslim community in the area following September 11 and was outspoken in his opposition to the terrorist attack. “To say that he was opposed to the hijackings,” said Hassan, “that’s even an understatement.”

“Right after September 11,” he continued, “he was the main spokesman for our community. Our imam was overseas and he could not come. And Rabih, he went to interfaith the same week and spoke very strongly against terrorism, against the attack on New York. The following week he was our spokesman at the town hall meeting held by Ms. Rivers, and honestly, he was the most eloquent speaker and he received the most applause.”

Hassan said of Haddad, “He always talks about reaching out to the others—to cooperate, to live together peacefully.” Hassan said the MCA received numerous requests for speakers after September 11, and Haddad spoke at several churches and corporations: “He was visible, he took on this responsibility.... We had a Mosque open house in Ann Arbor in November. We had activities for non-Muslims, etc. We had over 2,000 come from the Ann Arbor area in just one day. Again he was the main speaker there.”

Haddad’s arrest has prompted divisions within the government over its handling of the case. While the Justice and Immigration Departments have pursued deportation proceedings against the Muslim family, Haddad’s wife, Salma Al-Rushaid, educated in the US and the daughter of a Kuwaiti diplomat, was invited to Washington by Rep. John Conyers to speak before the Judiciary Committee, where she was warmly welcomed. Al-Rushaid was also a prominent figure at a major Martin Luther King commemoration meeting held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on January 21.

The main speaker at the ceremonies was US Attorney for the Detroit area, Jeffery Collins. Collins, an African American, was appointed by Bush and has been the coordinator of the interrogations by the Justice Department of Arab immigrants. Irony would have it that he was invited to speak on the fight for civil rights while he pursues a round-up of Middle Eastern men. At the event he was asked about the Haddad case and the recent letters of deportation sent to Al-Rushaid and the couple’s children. To the dissatisfaction of the audience, Collins stated Haddad was being treated well and expressed his fervent support for the Bush administration’s war on terrorism.

“The actions of the government in this case have been disgraceful,” Nizah Hassan said. “Again, I think there is a lot of incompetence. I wish it were otherwise, I don’t know. But for them to pick on someone like Rabih, I think they should embrace him. They should want more people like him to bridge whatever gaps there are between Muslims and non-Muslims. And he was doing this. But I guess it looks good to arrest somebody who was a leader of the community.”



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