

Michigan rally marks one year since the arrest of Rabih Haddad

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4 January 2003

On December 14, supporters of Rabih Haddad held a rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan marking a year since the arrest of the Islamic leader and cleric, who has been held without charges by the Bush administration's Justice Department.

"It will be 365 days and counting," stated a banner on the platform of the rally, 'Where is Rabih? Where is justice?'

Haddad was arrested at his home in Ann Arbor more than a year ago on a minor visa violation. On the same day, the FBI and the US Treasury Department raided the suburban Chicago offices of Global Relief Foundation (GRF), the Islamic charity co-founded by Haddad, along with the offices of another charity, the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF).

The Treasury Department froze the assets of both GRF and BIF based on Justice Department allegations the charities were funding terrorist organizations. Haddad, his lawyers and supporters have vigorously opposed such allegations. Despite a year-long investigation—including numerous court hearings, a grand jury investigation into GRF and over 4,500 pages of legal fillings—the government has not charged Haddad or GRF with a single crime.

Haddad was recently denied a request for political asylum by an immigration judge, who echoed the government's unsubstantiated charge that Haddad is tied to terrorism. In his decision, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Judge Robert Newberry ordered Haddad and his family deported from the US, but denied them the right to leave on their own.

Much of the alleged evidence used by the government against Haddad has been kept secret from him, his attorneys and the press. The government claims this is necessary to prevent Al Qaeda from gaining access to its information. While there have been numerous legal

appeals by the media and civil rights advocates to open Haddad's legal proceedings to the public, the majority of the hearings have remained closed.

Press reports initially indicated Haddad faced imminent deportation to Lebanon, his native country. However, this is not the case, according to Noel Saleh, Haddad's attorney. Saleh said he and other attorneys working on Haddad's defense have filed an appeal on both the denial of asylum and bond by Judge Newberry. The two appeals automatically place a stay on Haddad's deportation ruling and the cases will be heard before the Immigration Board of Appeals.

News reports state that, if deported, the Haddad family could be broken up, with Rabih deported to Lebanon, and his wife, Salma Al-Rushaid, along with their four children, deported to her native country, Kuwait.

At the Ann Arbor rally several speakers drew attention to the Bush administration's attack on civil liberties in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Speaker after speaker denounced the incarceration of Haddad as an attack on basic democratic rights.

"This case is about more than Rabih Haddad," said attorney Michael Steinberg, legal director for the Michigan American Civil Liberty Union, addressing the rally. "It is about freedom from illegal incarceration. It is about the principal of due process." Steinberg said Haddad has been denied that right. "He has been tried before a secret immigration hearing. He has been held with secret warrants."

Steinberg noted the conflicts that have developed within the judicial system between dictates from the White House and the contradictory rulings from both the federal and appeals courts.

"The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled

unanimously to uphold the concept of open courts by backing the decision of Federal Judge Nancy Edmunds to open Haddad's hearings," continued Steinberg," "Judge Damon Keith, chief judge of the appeals court, said in opposition to the position of the Bush administration, 'Democracies die behind closed doors.'"

"Rabih has become a symbol," Asad Tarsin, former leader of the University of Michigan Muslim Students Association, told the rally. "If Rabih was to come home we would say, OK, we know we have rights. But if he does not, we will think we are not safe here."

Tarsin reported that after he attended the bond hearing for Haddad last October, "I told my wife, from the way they were asking those questions and the reaction of the judge, it could be any one of us up there."

"These are going to be difficult times for everyone," Noel Saleh told the WWSWS. Saleh, a civil rights attorney representing Haddad, said he was shaken by the Bush administration's assault on democratic rights: "The first assault is going to be on aliens and the next assault is going to be on Americans."

"Why? They very much identify them as 'the enemy,'" Saleh said. "It is very much like they identified communism as the enemy in the '50s. Now they have found a new enemy to rail against and September 11 has given them the excuse to do it."

Rabih Haddad's case has exemplified the unprecedented assault on the democratic rights of Arab and Muslim immigrants mounted by the Bush administration since the terror attacks. The defense of Haddad, a leader of the Muslim Association in Ann Arbor and an assistant cleric, became the rallying point of a movement opposed to the destruction of the rights of Middle Eastern immigrants.

Like Haddad, many Muslim and Arab men were arrested and held for minor immigration violations following September 11. Under the new anti-terror measures established by the USA Patriot Act and implemented by US Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Justice Department, the government is given wide latitude with regard to immigrants or anyone designated as a "terror suspect." Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of immigrants denied the right to legal representation, placed in solitary confinement or locked up for 23 hours a day, shackled

and denied the right to see family members.

According to a December 11, 2002 report by the Associated Press, the Justice Department has now admitted that the overwhelming majority of the 900 post-September 11 detainees had nothing to do with terrorism. Presently, only 6 out of 765 people arrested for immigration violations are presently being held by the INS. The rest have been deported or are free awaiting a final decision. Another 134 immigrants were charged with criminal offenses, 99 of whom were found guilty through pleas or trials.

The AP statement says "many of the crimes bear no direct connection to terrorism" and that many individuals have been held as "material witnesses" for interrogation purposes. Others were released but were allowed to stay in the US "because they cooperated with the investigation."



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