

US government deports Haddad family

Supporters organize a spirited send-off rally

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On Monday, July 28, the Bush administration's Justice Department deported the family of popular Muslim cleric Rabih Haddad, concluding another shameful chapter in the anti-democratic treatment of immigrants from the Middle East. More than 60 supporters held a spirited rally at the Detroit deportation center to express their support for the Haddad family.

Salma Al-Rushaid and the couple's four children, aged 5 to 13, were ordered to report to the Detroit office of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service) by 10 a.m. Monday, where they were processed. Federal agents then escorted the family to the Detroit Metropolitan airport.

Just two weeks earlier, Haddad was secretly deported, confirming the belief of many of his supporters that the government never had a case against him and that the charge of terrorism was part of a racist campaign against Arab and Muslim immigrants promoted by the government after September 11.

Rabih Haddad was a community activist and co-founder of an Islamic charity, Global Relief Foundation (GRF). On December 14, 2001, he was arrested for overstaying his visa, a charge that was considered a minor offense before September 11. On the same day, government agents raided GRF, accusing the organization of ties to Al Qaeda and other allegedly terrorist groups in the Middle East. Haddad and his wife have strenuously denied this allegation. Moreover, the government has never charged Haddad or GRF with a single criminal offense.

In January 2002, Salma Al-Rushaid was also served with a notice that she had overstayed her visa and would be deported, but not arrested. Later, the couple petitioned the court to have their cases joined.

Even on the visa issue, however, the government had no case against the family. Their lawyers explained that before their visa expiration in August 1999 they had filed for amnesty. In addition, the family had 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.

According to a Kristine Abouzahr, a spokesperson for the Free Rabih Haddad Committee and friend of the family, the US government planned to deport Al-Rushaid and the children to Kuwait where she is a citizen. The travel arrangements were complicated by the fact that members of the family were born in three different countries. Three of the children—Sana, 13; Sami, 10; and Ousama, 5—were born in Lebanon. Romi, 9, was born in the US, making him a US citizen. Al-Rushaid was born in Kuwait and is the daughter of Kuwaiti diplomats.

Abouzahr said Al-Rushaid was given assurances that once she was in Kuwait the government would issue her a passport within a few days so that she and her family could travel to Lebanon and reunite with her husband. Noel Saleh, the family attorney who assisted Al-Rushaid with the paperwork at the ICE center, said Al-Rushaid was in good spirits.

At the Detroit rally, scores of supporters expressed their opposition to the policies of the Bush administration and the wholesale attacks on democratic rights taking place under the bogus claim of a war on terrorism.

Gabriela said she was at the rally to support Mrs. Haddad, while Nava was particularly incensed at the accusations of terrorism used against Rabih Haddad. "The truth is, he was never charged," she stated. "The use of the visa violation was an excuse to keep him in jail."

"All of his rights were trampled on," she continued. "But what bothered me the most were the procedures. There was no process, just suspicions. This is worse than countries where there is tyranny. I feel we are living the very things we are supposed to be fighting."

"This is a country made up of immigrants. We can't start pointing one finger at the face of another. This is our strength, not our weakness. That is what the people in power want us to do."

Matt and Alexander are two high school students who

joined the demonstration. Alexander explained to the WSWS why he decided to attend the rally: “To me, when you hear the story, it is hard not to have some emotion and empathy for what this family has gone through, the torture this family has faced. I felt obligated to come out here and make it known to everyone who drives by here now what is going on inside.

“We should let them know that there are people who know what is going on here and there are people who will not stand for this. There are similarities to what was going on in the 1930s. Just to know what is going on and to stand idly by is a terrible, terrible thing. So I feel obliged to come out here and help.”

Matt said, “I had a hard time believing that this type of thing goes on here. I wanted to come out to show that I don’t agree with it.”

The WSWS spoke to Motoko, a member of the antiwar group Raging Grannies. As she put it, “I am a grannie and we protest injustices wherever we see it.”

Motoko told the WSWS, “They accused him of being a terrorist, but they never found anything on him. Then they secretly deported him to Lebanon without telling his family. And finally, one of the agents allowed him to call his family from Amsterdam to explain that that is where he was and he was on his way to Lebanon. Today, his wife and children are being deported. Three children were born in Lebanon, one in the US and the mother in Kuwait. Thank god, they are able to be together.

“We are waiting to tell the mother that whether they are here or in Lebanon, that we love them and that our hearts go out to them.”

Patricia Lay-Dorsey is a leading member of the Raging Grannies. Lay-Dorsey said she had spoken to Haddad at least once or twice since he traveled to Lebanon.

“Oh, he is angry,” stated Lay-Dorsey. “Angry that he lost 19 months of his life, angry that he was separated from his family for 19 months, angry that he was unable to do the work in the world that he had set out to do.

“He, Salma and all of us are going to work on clearing his name,” she continued. “Because it was all innuendo. If they had anything after 19 months, they would never have let him go. We all know that.

“We are not going anywhere,” Lay-Dorsey declared. “We want his name cleared. And we want the name of GRF cleared. The fact that someone would be treated this way is one of the most atrocious things I have seen in this country. I think this is one of the darkest chapters—that we can treat someone this way who is a humanitarian is almost unimaginable.”

Lay-Dorsey, an imposing figure despite being wheelchair-bound, then began a tirade at the press, thinking at first that

this reporter was a member of the big-business media. “I’m sorry to say that you people in the press have not been helpful. Reports were handed out at the trial by the Justice Department and [Attorney General] Ashcroft’s office and you just treated them as facts, and they weren’t facts,” she stated correctly. When I explained the standpoint of the *World Socialist Web Site*, she then apologized. “Oh, I didn’t mean you,” she said.

Michele Mercier reacted to a sign across the street that read, “Remember 9/11.” “Haddad was one of the first ones to speak out on the attack of 9/11,” stated Mercier. “He was deeply saddened by what had occurred.”

She added her own bitterness towards the government’s decisions: “I am extremely saddened and disappointed in our government. All this time they had him in detention I think made it very clear that he was guilty of nothing. Rabih is someone I love and respect, who worked hard for peace in this country and around the world. He was such a wonderful leader. He worked in the interfaith community. He was well known and respected by Christians and Jews in our community. It’s a tragedy.

“I am very saddened by what happened on 9/11. However, obviously, he wasn’t responsible for anything, or they would not have just let him go.

“I think they did not want him to stay here any longer because eventually he would have been able to clear his name; that he would have been able to prove that there was nothing wrong with anything that he did. So I think that is why he was so quickly removed from the country.”

In a separate development related to the treatment of post-9/11 detainees, a congressional report last week charged the US Justice Department with abusing the USA Patriot Act, the law enacted after September 11 that gave the Justice Department sweeping powers to arrest and detain immigrants and hold them indefinitely.

The report states there are 34 credible complaints from immigrants from the Middle East who faced mistreatment after they were arrested. The report, while a substantial understatement of the facts, nevertheless cites beatings and threats of murder from government officials against detainees.



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