



**Declaration of Johanne Durocher,
mother of Nathalie Morin and Chair of Nathalie Morin's Support Committee
at the protest held on June 26th, 2010 in front of the
Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Ottawa, Canada**

I would first like to thank Muslims for Progressive Values, women's groups and the Gulf War Veterans that have come here today to support us and request that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia release my daughter, Nathalie Morin, and my three grandchildren, by allowing them to leave Saudi territory and be repatriated to Canada.

My name is Johanne Durocher, I am the mother of Nathalie and the grandmother of Samir, Abdullah and Sarah. Since December 2005, my daughter is detained in Saudi Arabia where she is a victim of conjugal violence, maltreatment and confinement by her violent partner. My three grandchildren are also victims of maltreatment.

Although Nathalie has repeatedly asked Canadian consular services for nearly five years to be repatriated with her children, the Canadian government has not stood up to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its Family Code, that does not permit a woman to travel freely and leave the country without the consent of her male guardian. *Mehrem*, an archaic system of male guardianship, is based on veritable gender apartheid that legitimises conjugal violence against women and prohibits them from escaping; such is the case of Nathalie and her children.

Nathalie's story

My daughter Nathalie's story is simple, had it happened in Canada it would not have drawn any attention. Because in Canada, conjugal violence is a criminal act that can lead to imprisonment and resources exist to help women and children who are its victims. Nothing of the sort exists in Saudi Arabia.

In 2001, Nathalie met Saeed Al Sharahni in Canada at the age of 17. I wish to emphasise that they were never married and did not live together when Nathalie gave birth to Samir, her first son, whose family name is Morin. One month later, Saeed had to leave Canada to return to his home country, Saudi Arabia.

The pair maintained a long distance relationship between 2002 and 2005. Nathalie thought she would found a family with him; what could be more normal? During this



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time, Nathalie travelled with their son on two occasions to Saudi Arabia without encountering any major problems.

In 2005, when she returned to Saudi Arabia the third time, he started to be violent with her. He beat her, and from this moment on, started to threaten her. He demanded that she find a way for him to immigrate to Canada, or else he would detain her with her son Samir in Saudi Arabia. These threats became reality.

Since 2005, my daughter is confined by her violent partner in Saudi Arabia. He beats her, harasses her, wakes her up at night to deprive her of sleep, forces her to have unwanted sexual intercourse and Nathalie became pregnant again. She has, under these forceful relations, two more children. Saeed maltreats the children, bites them, whips them with electrical wires, burns them and crushes their hands and feet. Nathalie and the children are deprived of food, human contact, affection and support. They are Saeed Al Sharahni's hostages.

During this time, Mister Al Sharahni continues to multiply requests for goods and money (apartment, car, furniture, etc...) to the Saudi government, who are thus alerted by the situation. Nathalie and the children are instruments for increasing Saeed Al Sharahni's wealth, who can obtain from his government financial resources and material goods that are supposed to improve the living conditions of the family, while Nathalie and the children do not benefit. He even requested 300 000\$ US from the Canadian government for their repatriation. Is this not a ransom request?

For about a month, Nathalie is now confined by her partner at his family's home in Bisha. In this little town in southern Saudi Arabia, Nathalie has been deprived of food and water on numerous occasions and locked-up in a storage room. The only reason she has been permitted to eat and drink recently, has been due to the efforts of her Support Committee.

What are the Canadian and Saudi governments doing to protect Nathalie?

In these five years, that Canadian government has either ignored, diminished the situation of conjugal violence, of maltreatment and of confinement that Nathalie and her children are experiencing. Canadian consular officials in Riyadh do not cease to discredit Nathalie when she reports the cruelty she is a victim of. Not believing a victim is a form of psychological violence that worsens their situation and reinforces their sentiments of distress and despair.

The Canadian government has not deployed all necessary efforts to repatriate Nathalie and the children to Canada, claiming that the situation is a “private matter” and that Canada must respect Saudi laws. On several occasions, Canadian authorities even refused that Nathalie and her children find shelter at the Canadian Embassy because she did not have the authorisation from her male guardian.

As for the Saudi government, they apply their Family Code and the system of *mehrem*. This legitimises the situation of conjugal violence and maintains Nathalie and the three children as prisoners of their aggressor, Saeed Al Sharani, by stopping them from escaping his abuse.

Every day that passes I am terribly worried. My daughter’s safety is at risk, her psychological and physical states, as well as those of the children, are deteriorating.

Today, as heads’ of State of the most powerful countries of the world meet in Toronto for the G-20 summit, I am asking but one thing of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its representative, King Abdullah: **Free my daughter, Nathalie Morin and her three children from the bonds of their aggressor and act such that they may be repatriated to Canada.**

Five years of Hell is too long for the only “crime” of having loved! I ask that King Abdullah take action now during his visit to Canada during this G-20 summit! I ask that he act immediately!

I will never abandon my daughter Nathalie and my three grandchildren, Samir, Abdullah and Sarah to their undeserved fate. With the support of all the organisations and persons present today, we will continue without relent our actions so that they may come home.

Nathalie has but one dream: To live a normal life, free from violence, confinement or deprivation. A life with her children and her family, who has been waiting for her return for so long and who is ever hopeful. Thank you.