

Protest to Free Nathalie Morin and End Gender Apartheid
Saudi Embassy in Ottawa
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Shahla Khan Salter
Chair
Muslims for Progressive Values Ottawa
www.mpvottawa.com

We at MPV Ottawa are committed to working peacefully to make our world a better place.

We are a Muslim organization that supports not only gender equality but the self determination of women in every aspect of their lives.

We support not only tolerance, but social equality and acceptance of all people, regardless of faith, race, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation.

We are guided by Islam as conveyed to the world in the 6th century by our Prophet Mohammed, which calls on us to be merciful and kind and to support the believers – the believers being everyone who does good.

I greet you all with the greeting used by our Prophet when he greeted anyone – regardless of their tribe or faith - whether they were Muslims, Jews, Christians or people from any other faith. He said – may the peace and blessings of Allah(“The God”) be upon you.

Salaamualaikum.

I thank each and every one of you for coming today. Each of you has made a special contribution by taking the time and the energy to travel here. And it is very important that you are here today.

Together we give one another the inspiration and the strength we need to accomplish the enormous goal of peacefully taking on a very mighty force. And together we hope our presence will be felt by G20 leaders this weekend or at some time in the near future.

I am thanking each of you as individuals. I am also thanking the organizations and our Gulf war I vets, who are supporting MPV and the Nathalie Morin Support Committee – like the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and Mark Brousseau. To you, please know that your brave leadership has been contagious.

It has inspired others to join us - including MPV DC and other brave activists who are protesting right now at the Saudi embassy far away in distance, but in close in spirit, in Washington and who hope to protest in the near future in Zurich and in London.

All of us are on a journey and today every single one of those journeys, though unique, has brought us together to this common destination. And it is here that we find what we all have in common is a hungering need to change the world and to bring back to Canada and to safety a young Canadian and her children.

I only found out recently how difficult it is - the daily life of Nathalie Morin and her three small children. I only recently saw photos of Nathalie bruises, showing the injury to her body after her commonlaw husband, Saeed Al Sharahni beat her.

I only recently saw photos of the scars and swelling and bruises on the faces and necks of her little boys.

It breaks my heart. As do all of the details of their ordeal, relayed to me by Johanne, Nathalie's mother. Johanne – you are truly strong to be here today.

And what is truly heartbreaking about this is that there is no escape for Nathalie and her children.

When as a lawyer, I practiced family law back in the nineties, I helped Canadian women, in similar situations hatch their escape plans. It is such a dangerous time for a woman, when she outs her abuser and escapes with her children to a shelter or when she obtains that restraining order and changes the locks. Even in Canada. But there is a way to escape if you can survive.

But in Saudi Arabia, there is no escape if you are abused particularly if you have no family network there. And for Nathalie, traditional places to escape are not available. Nathalie can't escape to the home of her parents because they are here. Nathalie has no brothers in Saudi who can try and convince Saeed to be kinder and more caring.

Nathalie can't even leave the house, forget the country. Sometimes she can't even leave the small storage room that she is locked in. And if she's ever told she is allowed to leave, she can't leave, she won't leave, without those kids. Her moral conscience will not allow it.

The male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia does not allow Nathalie to leave without Saeed's consent. And its custody laws do not allow her to obtain custody of her children, so that she can leave with them and ensure they are safe. Men in Saudi Arabia are supposed to receive custody of their children, even in cases of abuse.

And it is not only Nathalie and her children who suffer in Saudi Arabia. The United Nations has said that many women and children suffer under the male guardianship system. That is it a vehicle to allow the dominance and coercion of women. And it must be abolished. It has demanded that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia abolish the male guardianship system under CEDAW, the United Nations Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Saudi government has failed to comply with this demand.

The Saudi government blames the male guardianship system and other laws that violate the human rights of women in Saudi Arabia, on Islam. It says Islam demands the segregation of sexes – a gender apartheid and the dominance of men in the male guardianship system. And they love it that this is such a pervasive belief everywhere outside the Muslim world, that its because of religion that human rights are violated - because it allows the Saudi government and any Muslim government to escape responsibility for failing to treat its people justly and with compassion.

Its not our fault, they say – its our religion.

Well we are here to say – and we will say it in Washington, and we will say it in every city in which there exists a Saudi Embassy, that we can reach, that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the guardian of the holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, the rulers of the land where our Prophet spread the message of Islam, are WRONG.

Islam has given women rights, to hold property, to lead governments, to teach religion, to be safe. It is the rulers of Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia who have twisted religion through their special science of interpretation, which has many schools and scholars, to say otherwise and to spread that twisted ideology around the world.

It is an ideology supported not only by the Saudi government but implicitly by their trading partners, who remain silent on these issues, even when their own citizens suffer because of it – like Canadians.

So – how precious is the life of a child, a Canadian child, to this Canadian government?

How sad is it that Sarah's mother cannot hold her or nurse her on those occasions when she is confined to a small space, locked up, weak from little food. How sad is it that children are being abused – children of a Canadian.

Let me say what is shocking – a Canadian government that cares so little about Canadian lives that it will ignore the pleas of a grandmother like Johanne Durocher, for five years.

Does Stephen Harper and his conservative government have a conscience?

What is the real cost of oil?

The real cost of oil exceeds the bounds of monetary currency. It is the cost of human lives. It allows democratically elected Western leaders to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries.

Like the sentence a Saudi court made of 300 lashes and eighteen months in jail on mother Sawsan Salim when she failed to show up with a male guardian at a government office.

Ms. Salim is in jail now serving an eighteen month sentence awaiting the lashes, with her son, who is a toddler, who lives there in jail, with her. Is she too far away for us to care? NO.

Here in Canada we can't let our leaders and the G20 leaders escape from their responsibility, to women like Sawsan Salim and Nathalie Morin and her children and escape from their conscience.

Not only because time and again, Saudi laws hold Canadians hostage, like Bill Sampson and Nazia Quazi and Nathalie Morin and her children – but because the world is small – we are not that far away from Saudi Arabia any more and intolerant ideologies have been known to spread.

We are all connected.

This is the reason we cannot turn a blind eye. We cannot allow our leaders to do so either. We must peacefully insist that peace and compassion be the rule rather than the exception everywhere in the world so our society and all societies remain free and safe – because we are all connected.

And it is love and compassion that will overcome intolerance and injustice.

G20 leaders, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, King Abdullah – President Obama – CAN YOU HEAR US?? This is you're your speech in Cairo last year, President Obama – “HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT JUST AMERICAN IDEAS!!”

FREE NATHALIE MORIN AND HER CHILDREN AND END GENDER APARTHEID IN SAUDI ARABIA – TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE!

Let us never give up hope that Nathalie Morin and her children will be home soon in Canada and that every place in the world will one day be safe for all women and children.

Insha'Allah – by the Grace of God.