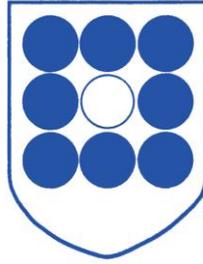


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September 8, 2017

The Right Honorable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

SENT VIA MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Prime Minister and Minister,

RE: Nathalie Morin

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (“CCLA”) to request, on an urgent basis, both information and action in relation to the case of Nathalie Morin.

As you may know, Ms. Morin is a Canadian woman, and a mother of four children aged 4-16, who has been unable to leave Saudi Arabia since March 2005. She is seeking protection from domestic abuse for herself and her children and is desperate to return to Canada. Although there is no current legal requirement for a male partner to provide permission for his female spouse or children to travel, under the Saudi custom of ‘mahram’ or male guardianship, Nathalie is effectively precluded from leaving the country without this permission. Her common law partner, the father of her children, and her alleged abuser, Saeed Al Bishi (a.k.a. Saeed El Sharahni), refuses to consent. In our view, Canada has a duty to take positive action and work diplomatically with Saudi Arabia to remove Ms. Morin and her four children to safety immediately, and to facilitate their eventual return to Canada.

CCLA previously wrote to former Ministers of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon and John Baird. At that time, we argued that Canada would be acting in accordance with its legal obligations under both the *Canadian Charter* and international law in asking Saudi Arabia to protect Ms. Morin and her children and

to facilitate their travel to Canada. Our legal reasoning is laid out in detail in our 2010 and 2011 letters, which are attached.

We are aware that Canadian officials were extensively involved in Ms. Morin's case for several years, at least up to 2013. We are told by Ms. Morin's mother, Johanne Durocher that she and her daughter were asked in 2012 by a Canadian representative, Mme. Monique L'Heureux, to cease their public advocacy activities on Nathalie's behalf in order to facilitate the government's ability to work on a diplomatic solution with the Saudi government. They did so, including shutting down their social media accounts and public awareness campaign. We understand from public reports that an attempt to assist the family shortly thereafter failed, and it is unclear to us whether there has been subsequent government engagement in this case. Four years later, Nathalie's mother tells us that she and her daughter fear that the strategy of silence has resulted in Nathalie simply being forgotten, by her government and the public. We are requesting an accounting of any official actions that demonstrate otherwise.

Your Government's feminist international assistance policy explicitly includes an action area addressing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and indicates support for projects that "combat sexual and gender-based violence," including:

"support for comprehensive approaches that help end these forms of violence, so that fewer women and girls are subjected to domestic violence...Canada's support will raise awareness of rights among women and girls to improve their access to justice and to provide psycho-social support for survivors of violence. Canada will also raise the importance of these issues through diplomatic channels and advocacy efforts."¹

Ms. Morin's case is one where those principles can, and must, be put into action not merely for a project, but on behalf of a Canadian citizen, who has been asking for more than a decade for protection from abuse and support to leave her abuser, and come home to Canada with her children. Diplomatic efforts on her behalf are both warranted, and consistent with Canada's obligations under domestic and international law.

We have recent information from Nathalie's mother, Johanne Durocher, that Nathalie's situation has not improved since CCLA first wrote to the government about her case. Indeed, she remains in the same dangerous domestic situation and is forced to rely on charity to feed herself and her children, because her husband refuses to support them. Even those who wish to assist Ms. Morin face significant risks; two women who helped her, Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Oyouni, were arrested and jailed for doing so.² Her children, and her eldest son in particular, have also allegedly suffered abuse from their father. Nathalie herself has communicated with us her undiminished and sincere desire to return to Canada with her children.

¹ Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, Core action area 1: Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Available http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng#5.1.

² For a contemporary description of the arrest and charges, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/05/saudi-activists-food-woman-husband>.

Nathalie and her children must not be forgotten or abandoned by their country. We ask you to give this case your urgent attention and look forward to your prompt reply to our request for information. We would be happy to discuss this case with you or your officials at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NMA', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Noa Mendelsohn Aviv
Acting Executive Director

cc. The Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women

Encl.