

'This is a travesty of justice': Diab supporters rally in front of Trudeau's office



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Hassan Diab, a Lebanese-born Canadian citizen, was arrested eight years ago in Ottawa on murder charges from a 1980 bombing outside a Paris synagogue. *TONY CALDWELL / POSTMEDIA*

Family, friends, and supporters of former Ottawa academic Hassan Diab gathered in front of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office on Wednesday, and their message was loud and clear: bring Diab home from France.

"He spends his days swinging between pain and despair," said Rania Tfaily, Diab's wife, to the crowd.

Diab, a 63-year-old Lebanese-born Canadian citizen, has been in a French jail for the past 30 months, extradited to France in 2014 after being accused of bombing a Paris synagogue in 1980. Four passerby were killed and more than 40 others were injured.

Diab has long maintained his innocence, saying he was not in Paris at the time of the attack. And French investigating judges have said there is "consistent evidence" that Diab is telling the truth. However, Diab remains in jail as the French appeals court has overturned six separate decisions by lower court judges, blocking his release on bail.

Critics contend that Diab has been kept behind bars because French judges are afraid of being accused of laxity in light of a spate of terrorism acts in France.

And while friends and family say Diab is a victim of unjust imprisonment, Diab, himself, is concerned about his supporters.

Diab's wife read a passage from his most recent letter to her in front of Wednesday's crowd.

"I feel sorry for the ordeal I've put you (and everyone else) in. I wanted to calm your anxieties so you know I'm still alive, at least. I started reorganizing my 'put away' stuff to unpack as if I'm staying here for good," Diab wrote.

"I know the man personally, I know his family and I know the facts of the case," said Barbara Riley, one of the supporters in the crowd, who met Diab and his family through mutual friends.

"This is a travesty of justice. This man is being punished for something he didn't do. It's completely unjust. And it needs to be changed and (he

needs to be) brought home."



Barbara Riley stands outside of the prime minister's office in support of Hassan Diab.



A crowd of Diab supporters rallying in front of the prime minister's office.

NDP MP Don Davies and Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party, also spoke and called on the Canadian government for support.

"I call on the Canadian government to immediately instruct its diplomats to convey to the French authorities the need to comply the six separate French court orders to release Hassan Diab on bail," Davies said.

Supporters brought homemade signs printed on paper and bed sheets. They sang along to songs written about Diab to the tune of well-known melodies. Paper tulips were passed around in the crowd and supporters were encouraged to write a message to Trudeau.

Statements were also read from Mohamed Fahmy, a Canadian journalist who was wrongfully imprisoned in 2013 for 14 months in Egypt, as well as Roger Clark, the former secretary general of Amnesty International Canada.

"I feel heartened by the fact so many people see the injustice in Hassan's case and they are asking the government to intervene," Tfaily said.

"I just want him to be home."

She will be travelling to Paris to visit Diab in July.

– *With files from Chris Cobb*