

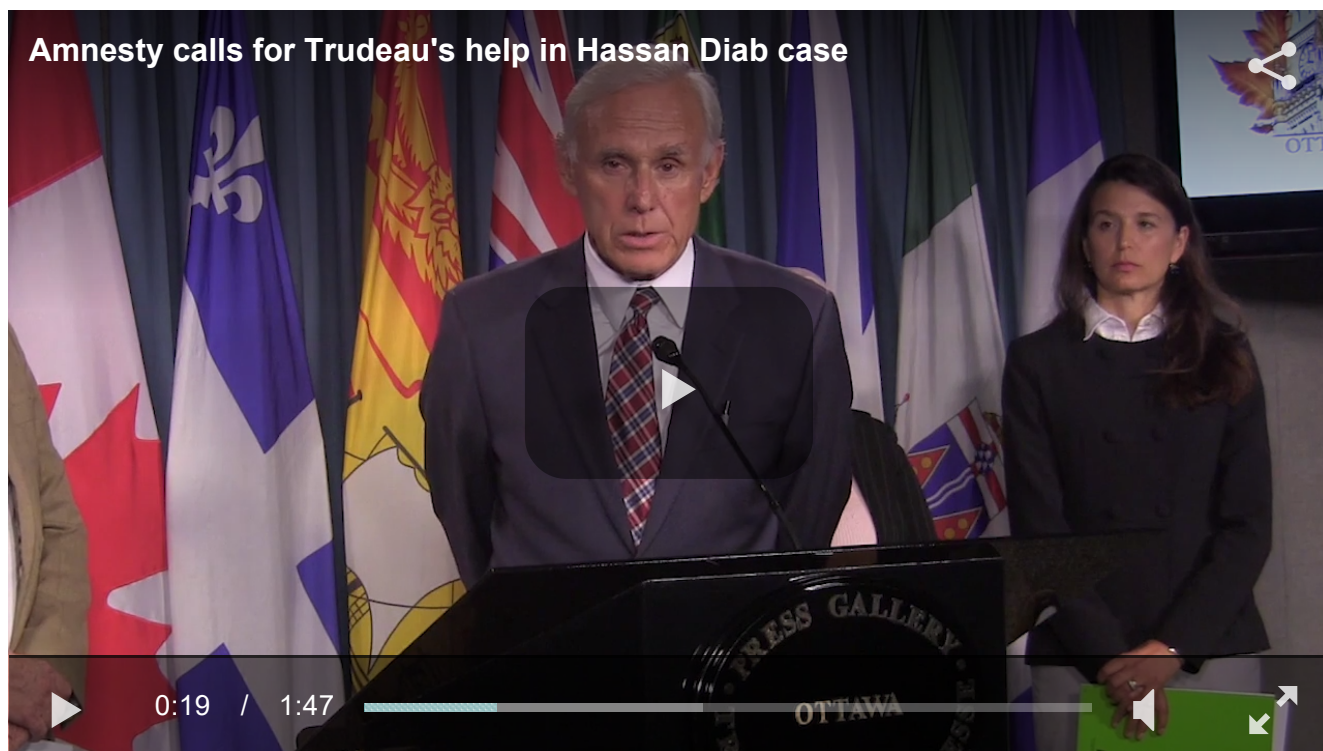
France accused of violating human rights by group lobbying for academic Hassan Diab's release



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Hassan Diab's first hint that French police suspected him of being a terrorist was in October 2007 when a French newspaper reporter approached him after class at the University of Ottawa.

That was exactly 27 years after a devastating bomb attack outside a Paris synagogue that killed four and injured more than 40.

In the year following his short exchange with the French reporter, Diab noticed he was being followed and often obviously so. He complained to the Ottawa police, only to discover later that it had been the RCMP tailing him.

On Nov. 28, 2008 an RCMP tactical squad arrived at his home, banged on his door and arrested him at the request of the French government. He was jailed and denied bail for four and a half months before being released on what amounted to house arrest. As part of his bail agreement the now unemployed professor was forced to pay \$2,000 a month for an ankle GPS.

His formal extradition hearing started on Nov 28, 2010 and ended March 9, 2011. He was committed for extradition in June 2011.

On Nov 14, 2014, six years after his arrest and after numerous appeals, he was flown to Paris, hours after the Supreme Court – his final hope – refused to hear the case.

In the two and a half years since, the 63-year-old Ottawa academic has been incarcerated in a maximum-security prison outside Paris and has been ordered released on bail six times by investigative judges. Each order has been appealed by prosecutors, and overturned by appeal court judges.

The number six also figured large at a Parliament Hill news conference on Wednesday.

Diab's Ottawa lawyer Don Bayne told reporters that the French investigators now have six independent Lebanese witnesses all of whom have corroborated evidence that Diab was studying and taking exams with them when the Paris atrocity happened. University records show he took and passed exams at around the same time.

Bayne is urging the Liberal government to push for Diab's immediate repatriation.

In another significant announcement Wednesday, Amnesty International Canada threw its weight behind efforts to get Diab

released, accusing France of violating international human rights and the Canadian government of failing to come to Diab's aid.

"Liberty is an essential, precious human right," said Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty Canada's English branch. "That is why international human rights obligations binding on France and binding on Canada, establish important safeguards against liberty being taken away arbitrarily.

"And there is absolutely no doubt that France has breached those safeguards, has violated and continues to violate Hassan Diab's right to liberty, and thus stands in violation of numerous international human rights treaties ratified by France over several decades."

Amnesty has written to Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould urging them to intervene "forcefully" with French authorities.

Diab's Paris lawyer has called the situation "unprecedented" and says the Lebanon-born sociology professor is being denied freedom because of the prevailing political mood in the wake of recent terror attacks in France and Europe.

Investigating Judge Jean-Marc Herbaut has said that there is 'consistent evidence' that Diab is telling the truth and that he was not in Paris in Oct. 1980.

Diab, who is the father of two young children, has consistently denied involvement in the bombings and says he is the victim of mistaken identity.

In blocking his release, prosecutors claim he is a flight risk and a danger to public order.

However, the academic was released for 10 days last spring while prosecutors scrambled to appeal his release.

He stayed with a fellow academic in Paris and wore a GPS monitoring system on his ankle – paid for by the French government — and moved around Paris without incident.