



'2 classes of citizenship' Opposition MPs blast Tories over treatment of visible-minority Canadians abroad

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The federal government is discriminating against some Canadians when it comes to helping those who run into trouble overseas, opposition MPs charged yesterday.

Speaking to reporters as Parliament's foreign affairs committee held an emergency meeting to study the treatment of Canadians abroad, NDP MP Paul Dewar suggested it's no accident that several of those recently let down by the government come from visible minorities. "It's hard not to point the finger at the government and say what do you have against citizens who are Muslim and who have brown skin," said Dewar, who announced plans to table legislation calling for an ombudsman and ensuring better protection for Canadians abroad.

Liberal MP Joe Volpe said the government appears to be dividing Canadians into two categories.

"We don't think that there are two classes of citizenship, but indications are that the government is headed in that direction," Volpe said.

The charges came as a Toronto woman stranded in Kenya for three months took her case to Parliament Hill.

Suaad Hagi Mohamud told members of the committee how a trip to visit family in May turned into a nightmare after officials in the Canadian High Commission questioned her identity and her Canadian citizenship.

"I went through a horrible, horrible time," said Mohamud. "I never want another Canadian to go through such a terrible thing."

Mohamud, who is suing the federal government for \$2.5 million, appeared to strike a chord with MPs on both sides of the House. Several sympathized with her and told her they want the committee to get to the bottom of the issue.

INTERNAL REVIEW

The government has also ordered an internal review, but her lawyer, Julian Falconer, said they would prefer to see an independent party investigate the "Kafkaesque" case.

Senior officials in the foreign affairs department and the Canada Border Services Agency described the steps their departments take to assist Canadians who need consular help abroad.

However, they refused to discuss Mohamud's case, saying they didn't want to affect the court case against the government.