

Canada, US 'moral equivalent' of Al-Qaeda, says senator

The pending Nuremberg-type trial of an Afghan Canadian at Guantanamo Bay has led a senator to equate Canada and the US with Al-Qaeda for human rights violations.

Appearing before a House of Commons committee on international human rights in Ottawa Tuesday, Canadian senator Romeo Dallaire said the US and his own country have sunk to the moral equivalent of Al-Qaeda terrorists in their maltreatment of child soldier Omar Khadr held at Guantanamo Bay.

Now 21, Khadr was captured in Afghanistan in 2002 for allegedly throwing a grenade that killed an American soldier. The US has ordered his trial before a military tribunal. Being a Canadian citizen, he is the only western detainee at the US military base.

His will be the first such trial after the Nuremberg trials of the Nazis after World War II.

The senator said Khadr was a child soldier who deserved to be rehabilitated in society, rather than subjected to what he termed an illegal trial. He said the Americans were paranoid about security after 9/11 and ignoring international laws and conventions in their treatment of Khadr.

Criticising his own government for not doing anything to bring Khadr back, Dallaire said Canada was betraying itself by kowtowing to the Americans.

The senator, who represents the opposition Liberal party, added, "The minute you start playing with human rights, with conventions, with civil liberties, in order to say that you're doing it to protect yourself and you are going against those rights and conventions, you are no better than the guy who doesn't believe in them at all."

By ignoring Khadr's rights, he said, "we are slipping down the slope of going down that same route" as Al-Qaeda terrorists.

In rebuttal, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism Jason Kenney asked the senator what he thought of Al-Qaeda outfitting mentally retarded girls with explosives and forcing them to blow themselves off in crowded Baghdad markets.

"Is it your testimony that Al-Qaeda strapping up a 14-year-old girl with Down syndrome and sending her into a pet market to be remotely detonated is the moral equivalent to Canada's not making extraordinary political efforts for a transfer of Omar Khadr to this country?" Kenney asked him.

But the senator, who has served as special UN ambassador for children, insisted that Canada was playing politics in the Khadr case since its own forces have rehabilitated over 7,000 other child soldiers in Afghanistan.

How is Khadr different from those who have been rehabilitated? he asked.

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