

RICHARD COLVIN FACES 'REPRISAL' FOR DETAINEE TESTIMONY

Letter accuses Conservative government of retaliating against diplomat who blew whistle on Afghan torture by refusing to pay his legal bills

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The Canadian diplomat who charged that Ottawa turned a blind eye to his warnings about torture of Afghan prisoners now says he's being punished by the Harper government for speaking out.

Richard Colvin's lawyer talks of this "reprisal" in a letter released today that says Ottawa is ignoring his requests for further legal aid funding as he prepares to appear before an inquiry investigating the handling of Afghan prisoners.

Mr. Colvin, who reignited the long-simmering Afghan detainee issue last fall, is entitled to government funding because he's a public servant.

But the government has failed to respond to requests to resolve the legal bills of Mr. Colvin, who was posted to Afghanistan for 17 months between 2006 and 2007. It offered an initial amount last fall, which Mr. Colvin's lawyers said was insufficient to cover costs.

The Conservatives launched harsh attacks on the public servant after his testimony before a Parliamentary committee last fall, dismissing his credibility and suggesting he'd been duped by Taliban propaganda.

Mr. Colvin first emerged on the Afghan file last October when he told the Military Police Complaints Commission via affidavit that he'd raised early red flags about the torture of prisoners back in May and June of 2006.

"Coupled with the government's public attacks on Mr. Colvin and his testimony before the Special Committee on ... Afghanistan, our client is left with the reasonable belief that the denial of further legal indemnification is a reprisal for his participation before the committee and the commission," lawyer Owen Rees wrote in a letter sent to the Military Police Complaints Commission today.

The commission is preparing to resume hearings into the Afghan detainee matter in late March and Mr. Colvin's testimony is expected to play a role in this inquiry.

Without legal representation, Mr. Rees said, it would be difficult for Mr. Colvin to continue to testify before the commission.

Richard Colvin Faces 'Reprisal' for Detainee Testimony

“The government of Canada’s inaction in this regard is impeding our client’s ability to participate as a witness before the commission with the assistance of legal counsel, which is appropriate and necessary given the complexity of the legal issues raised, including the government’s claims of national security confidentiality,” he wrote.

The government has denied all of Mr. Colvin’s allegations.

“There are incredible holes in the story that have to be examined,” Defence Minister Peter MacKay told the Commons at the time, rejecting calls for a public inquiry.

With a report from The Canadian Press

2: