

## Defending Mohamed Cherfi, Defending the Principle of Sanctuary

A crowd of over 50 people gathered in front of the downtown Ottawa offices of Immigration Canada today to demonstrate their outrage at yet another attack on immigrant and refugee rights.

This emergency action was called barely 24 hours prior to the event, and was in reaction to the arrest last Friday of Mohamed Cherfi, a "non-status" Algerian living in Montréal. Cherfi had followed a centuries-old tradition of seeking refuge from persecution within the confines of a religious sanctuary, in this case the Saint-Pierre United Church in Québec City. Without access to any due process of law, Cherfi was immediately deported to the United States where he is being held in prison.



The Ottawa demonstration gained the attention of both television and radio media, as well as a crowd of office-workers and passers-by. The crowd gathered around an enormous banner reading 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All', and heard short talks from former MP Michael Cassidy and Bob McDonald, both of whom are members of the First Unitarian Congregation Ottawa. Cassidy condemned Cherfi's arrest as an outrageous violation of a fundamental humanitarian tradition. He led the crowd in chants of "We want justice, Bring Mohamed home!" and "Respectons le sanctuaire!".



**Sophie Harkat, supporting Mohamed Cherfi as well as her detained husband, Mohamed Harkat**

Those gathered also heard brief comments from Christian Legeais, of the Justice for Mohamed Harkat Committee. Harkat is an Ottawa man who continues to be detained under a "Security Certificate" - without any proper charges, without an open trial, without access to the evidence supposedly being held against him, without any of the due process of law accorded by the Canadian Charter of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Viewed together, the violation of sanctuary, and the use of Security Certificates to deny refugees and landed immigrants their right to due process clearly indicate that the Canadian government and its security services have abandoned previous commitments to basic human rights and humanitarian norms.