

## Influential Muslim Cleric Claims Israeli Torture During Deportation Hearing (Associated Press)

Influential Muslim Cleric Claims Israeli Torture  
During Deportation Hearing

Monday, June 02, 2008

```
function farkItButton(h, u, s) {
if (!IsDef(h)) {
if (IsDef(window.fark_headline)) {
h = window.fark_headline;
} else {
h = "";
}
}
u = unescape(location.href);
var img = 'FarkItButton2_16x16.gif'; imgw = 16; imgh = 16;
document.write("");
}
function IsDef(variable) {
return (!(variable||false))
}
function GetThis(T, C, U, L)
{
var targetUrl = 'http://www.myspace.com/Modules/PostTo/Pages/?' + 't=' + encodeURIComponent(T) + '&c=' +
encodeURIComponent(C) + '&u=' + encodeURIComponent(U) + '&l=' + L;
window.open(targetUrl);
}
```

AP

March 9: Mohammad Qatanani, imam at the Islamic Center of Paterson, N.J., is fighting his deportation order.

NEWARK, N.J. &mdash; A Muslim cleric living in New Jersey graphically described on Monday the torture to which he claims he was subjected in Israeli custody, as he fought to block U.S. efforts to deport him on grounds he lied on his residency application.

The detention incident is at the heart of the deportation proceedings against Mohammad Qatanani, a Palestinian who has been the spiritual leader at the Islamic Center of Passaic County in New Jersey since 1996.

U.S. officials, in rejecting his bid for permanent U.S. residency, said Qatanani failed to disclose on his green card application a 1993 arrest and conviction in Israel for being a member of the militant group Hamas.

Qatanani denies the charges, saying he was detained, not arrested, by the Israelis along with many Palestinians at the time. Qatanani

claims he was not aware of the conviction and claims he was subjected to physical and mental abuse while in detention. Over the past few weeks, a number of character witnesses have testified on his behalf, including a rabbi.

In court on Monday, Qatanani recounted his time in Israeli detention &mdash; describing being tied to a small chair with his hands bound, kept in a freezing cell, and subjected to violence and threats &mdash; several of his supporters in the packed courtroom began quietly weeping.

"Judge, you can not imagine," Qatanani said, his voice breaking. "They say 'We will kill your family.' They say: 'You know what your family is doing now? We will go to them, we will burn them.'"

Qatanani paused to compose himself before telling Immigration Judge Alberto J. Riefkohl, "At that time, you feel that death is better than life."

His lawyers also tried to distance him from his controversial predecessor at the mosque, Mohammed el-Mezain, who was arrested and is facing re-trial on charges of funneling money to Palestinian terrorist groups.

Qatanani testified that he did not get along with el-Mezain and never shared his vision. On the stand, Qatanani pointed to his commitment to interfaith dialogue, cooperation with law enforcement, and the integration of Muslims into mainstream American society.

Riefkohl, who is hearing the case in Newark federal court, said Monday would probably be the last day of the trial.

The judge said it could take him a month or more to decide whether Qatanani, his wife, and three of the couple's six children who are foreign-born can remain in the United States.

Qatanani said his children were raised here and that he felt connected to New Jersey after 13 years working in the state.

When asked by his lawyer why he was trying to stay in America, Qatanani said he loved the people.

"This country has a very beautiful people, a very beautiful society," he said. "I [have seen] people supporting me &mdash; rabbis, officials, the fruits of working for 13 years is seen in this moment; everybody together saying, 'We want to continue this journey'."