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## NJ Muslim leader talks of torture in Israel (Associated Press)

NJ Muslim leader talks of torture in Israel June 3, 2008 -  
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Mohammad Qatanani, center, acknowledges supporters from the steps of a federal building in Newark, N.J., Monday, June 2, 2008, during a lunch break in his deportation trial. The United States government has rejected his bid for permanent U.S. residency, saying Qatanani failed to disclose a 1993 arrest and conviction in Israel for being a member of Hamas on his green card application. Qatanani denies the charges, saying he was detained, not arrested, by the Israelis along with many Palestinians at the time. (AP Photo/Mike Derer)

By SAMANTHA HENRY

Associated Press  
Writer

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) - A Muslim cleric graphically described the torture to which he claims he was subjected to in Israeli custody as he fought to block U.S. efforts to deport him on grounds he lied on his residency application.

"Judge, you cannot imagine," Mohammad Qatanani said Monday, 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."

The detention is at the heart of the deportation proceedings against 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 and several high-ranking New Jersey law enforcement officials.

Lawyers for both sides have until July 31 to submit written final summations, and Immigration Judge Alberto J. Riefkohl, who is presiding over the case in Newark federal court, said he would render a decision in mid-September.

In court on Monday, Qatanani recounted his time in Israeli detention \_ describing being tied to a small chair with his hands bound, kept in a freezing cell, and subjected to starvation, violence and threats. Several of his supporters in the packed courtroom began quietly weeping as he spoke.

Under cross-examination, lawyers for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security \_ which oversees immigration proceedings \_ sought to tie Qatanani to terrorist-affiliated groups and individuals.

Monday was the fourth and final day of the trial. On the stand, Qatanani pointed to his commitment to interfaith dialogue, cooperation with law enforcement and the integration of Muslims into mainstream American society.

The streets outside federal court were packed with Qatanani supporters wearing T-shirts and carrying signs calling him a man of peace.

A group of orthodox Jews stood amid the mostly Muslim crowd, saying they were there to show solidarity with Qatanani, who they said had championed their fight to get a kosher slaughterhouse in Paterson.

"We hope and pray in our day and age, with so much conflict, to have such a person as this imam working together with communities like ours," said Rabbi Dovid Feldman as he stood with the crowd.

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