

ALMASRY ALYOUM

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Youssef Nada speaks



By Sharl Fouad el-Masry

At the end of September Youssef Nada's name was removed from the United Nations Security Council's terrorism watch list. Nada, an Egyptian-born businessman and Muslim Brotherhood leader who is currently living in exile in Switzerland, has been involved in an ongoing legal battle to clear his name ever since the United States accused him eight years ago of financing Al Qaeda and other violent groups.

Al-Masry Al-Youm called Nada at his home in Switzerland to congratulate him on his partial exoneration and to discuss his troubles over the last few years, as well as his future and that of the Brotherhood. As always, Nada's answers were exciting.

The interview went as follows:

Al-Masry Al-Youm: What is the story behind lifting your name off terrorism list and what does Swiss legislator Dick Marty have to do with it?

Youssef Nada: Senator Dick Marty, special rapporteur for the European Council,

does not remove names, whether from United Nations Security Council lists, Swiss lists or any other. The man is head of the foreign affairs committee in the Swiss senate, chairman of the European Council's legal affairs committee and the council's human rights rapporteur. Marty was the one who exposed the clandestine collaboration between European governments and the American CIA in the kidnapping and the rendition of terrorism suspects to secret prisons in Egypt, Jordan, Romania, Bulgaria, Iraq and Afghanistan for torture.

Despite his political experience, his main focus is the protection of human rights. Our case was the only one in Europe that involved cooperation between 12 states, led by the Swiss attorney general, in response to a request by the US and under American supervision since September 2001. They could not provide any proof of our involvement with terrorism financing, as was alleged by Washington. So we brought a case against the prosecutor general, whom the Swiss Supreme Court rebuked for being late in notifying us of the charges. Investigations were dropped on 31 May 2005 after he admitted to the lack of any evidence.

Nevertheless, the US refused to remove our names from Washington's terrorism list or the lists compiled by the UNSC, the EU and the UK. Switzerland, as a member of the UN, announced that it was bound by the UNSC resolution and would not be able to remove our names from its lists at the moment.

Marty could not remain silent and sent a television crew from the European Parliament to listen to my defense and consider my inability to travel. A video presentation was then made for European parliamentarians after which the senator called for a vote on the issue. All members, except for Romania and Bulgaria, agreed, and the draft resolution was then submitted to the Swiss senate.

"Youssef Nada's case dishonors Switzerland," Marty declared. He then demanded that the Swiss government inform the UNSC that, as of the end of December, Switzerland would not be bound by the council's terrorism lists, which have included some names for more than three years despite a lack of evidence in many cases.

Al-Masry: Did Marty run up against any opposition?

Nada: The Swiss foreign minister protested the motion and asked the Swiss Senate to reject it. But when the motion was put to a vote, it was unanimously approved.

Al-Masry: Has there been any intervention by countries that took part in the inquiry?

Nada: Yes. The US fears that the Swiss government will implement the resolution and that other countries might also begin to override UNSC resolutions. So it lifted its veto against my name and agreed to remove it from the council's list. But it has yet to remove it from Washington's terrorism list.

Al-Masry: Does the removal of your name from the list bolster the international legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Nada: This has not happened and is not expected to happen. The group, and those that subscribe to its ideology, seek the aid of Allah in their afflictions and do not seek compromises to avert them. The Brotherhood draws its legitimacy from Allah's instructions, not from anything else.

Al-Masry: Did you receive support from the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau?

Nada: The Guidance Bureau should not be preoccupied with my personal matters. The bureau has more important issues to deal with at the missionary, social and public health levels, as well as those of internal and external policy. It also handles those problems created by the government's heavy-handed and violent approach, legal violations and abuses of power.

Al-Masry: Did the MB offer you moral and financial support?

Nada: The MB supports anyone who is persecuted, whether he belongs to the group or not. Thank God, I didn't need any support and my living conditions

remained unchanged for the past eight years.

As for allegations that I am persecuting the Egyptian regime, the contrary is in fact correct. It's the regime that has been hunting me down, both before I left Egypt in 1966 and after I left.

It continued to incite other countries against me with false and unjust allegations. In 1966, the regime sentenced me in absentia to ten years in jail, and in 2008 a military tribunal again slapped me with a ten-year prison sentence in absentia. Like all Muslim Brotherhood members, I only seek the justice of Allah.

Al-Masry: Are you afraid of the Egyptian regime?

Nada: No, I only fear Allah. Despite attempts to straightjacket me over the past 50 years, my political, financial, industrial, social, charitable and missionary activities have not stopped. Though I had earlier opted to work covertly, I later decided to work out in the open in order to prove that they have failed to achieve their ends.

Al-Masry: Will you resume your business activities?

Nada: The Taqwa Bank and seven other companies that I own in several countries were forced to liquidate their activities years ago, thus sustaining huge losses. We can't legally get back to debtors or liquidators or request documents as the five-year deadline has passed.

It was not possible for us to take any steps in this regard within the last eight years, because our group has been severely restricted and its members banned from traveling. Our names were also distributed to international banks, which were instructed not to deal with us, even though we were the largest shareholders and investors in the Taqwa Bank.

Al-Masry: Are they going to return your money, which some have estimated at US\$200 million when you were first put on the black list in 2001?

Nada: I still don't know and I can't tell. Some real estate was seized by the tax authority, some was seized while we were away and sold, and we don't know where the corresponding legal documents are. We can only turn to God to save us.

Al-Masry: Are you going to ask for the bank and the companies to be removed from the terrorist watch lists?

Nada: We will keep calling for the bank and companies to be lifted from the lists for moral and not financial reasons, because it was said we used them to finance terrorism.

Al-Masry: You are wanted in Egypt to serve your 10-year prison sentence. But lifting your name from black lists indicates you are now free to move and can travel anywhere. Does this pose any danger to you as you could be handed over to Egypt if you go to a country with a criminal exchange agreement with Egypt?

Nada: What you're saying might be done by rogue states, which I will avoid traveling to. But an emergency landing in Egypt due to a malfunction or meteorological problems is still possible, and that did happen once in 1966. So I talked to the pilot and explained the situation and he landed in Athens Airport instead of Cairo Airport.

But such incidents have not and will not stand in my way. My fate is in the hands of God and not any oppressor. In the Muslim Brotherhood, I've learned to accept fate. I just do what needs to be done and leave the rest to God.

Al-Masry: What can you say about the lawsuits you filed in Swiss courts?

Nada: Swiss courts are still looking into two lawsuits, and there's one that I filed in the European Court. My lawyers insist that I carry on with it for moral reasons related to my family.

Al-Masry: Are you going to make return to the world of business?

Nada: They say old habits die hard. I plan to return to the worlds of business and politics until God wishes otherwise. This isn't my first time round and it won't be my last, God willing.

Al-Masry: What does that mean for the Muslim Brotherhood and your position within the group?

Nada: Ever since I was young I've believed in the group's ideas. For over 60 years I've followed its line of thought. My leaders appointed me to one position in the Brotherhood, international relations coordinator. I think I've done my best and achieved a lot in that position. According to Brotherhood regulations, the Supreme Guide has the authority to assign anyone to any post, without the approval of the Guidance Bureau. I can't decline to carry out a mission which he or his successor assigns me during his mandate. You can thus direct your question to him.

Al-Masry: How would you comment on your exoneration?

Nada: I was exonerated abroad and indicted at home. But I still love my country and my people, even if they deal harshly with me.

Al-Masry: Do you still hold the same position regarding banning women and Copts from running for the presidency?

Nada: MB members have different views on this based on Islamic jurisprudence. They chose to adopt one such view that bans women and Christians (I say Egyptian Christians and not Copts because many Egyptian Muslims are Copts). Should they be arrested for that?

Also, we're talking about nomination for the elections and not the results of the elections. Everyone has the right to be nominated for elections, be they individuals, groups or political parties.

Deputy General Guide Mohamed Habib clarified this point when he said that, in the case that the Muslim Brotherhood becomes an official political party, it

would only nominate a candidate who is a Muslim male and not a Copt or a woman. However, any other group has the right to nominate whoever it deems best as a candidate.

We will recognize a Coptic president if he is chosen by the people. Although I and a few other MB members are against this, it is the choice of the majority that must prevail.

Al-Masry: Is it possible that MB may change its position?

Nada: If you look at it objectively, you will note the following points:

Firstly, Islamic jurisprudence was made by man and not by God. And so it is quite possible to change it to accommodate new developments. Even a fatwa can be changed.

Secondly, other generations of MB leaders may well have different points of view.

Thirdly, the MB is only part of Egyptian society, not all of it. It will have to abide by the choice of the majority.

Fourthly, MB members who object to certain things, like I do, must convince the majority of the group of their views in a democratic way. Internal dialogue does not mean division.

Finally, talking about nominations and elections implies that we are talking about a democratic regime, not a totalitarian one. The concept of rule by an Islamic Caliphate doesn't exist anymore. We have accepted the presidential system and we would abide by it in order to apply justice and equality. That democratic system should also be able to impeach the president if he does not answer to the popular will.

If the communists and the atheists have the right not to elect an MB member, why shouldn't we have that same right?

Al-Masry: Are you prepared to talk to the Americans?

Nada: I would talk to anyone, be it friend or enemy. God spoke with Satan; Abraham spoke with those who wanted to burn him; Moses spoke with Pharaoh; and Prophet Mohamed spoke with Jews, Christians and atheists. There should be no ban on talking to each other. Dialogue makes people understand each other more and helps to resolve problems. How can I defend my rights if I cannot explain them the offenders?

The regime has its own political motives, often accusing people of treason if they don't serve its interests.

The MB is not an insignificant little group. It is international. It represents the biggest Islamist group in the world. It cannot be restricted to what the regime wants it to be like.

Our dictators connive with the Americans and with Israel and the West against their own people. But if any group talks to the Americans, in order to explain things to them, it is immediately accused of treason.

Al-Masry: But the MB opted not to meet with American officials in Egypt without a government representative in attendance.

Nada: That decision pertains only to Egypt in light of the persecution the group faces there. But MB members abroad will talk to the devil if need be.

Al-Masry: Any last words?

Nada: I say it out loud: I will yield to no restriction. And I may have a big surprise for you early next year--if I'm still alive.

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