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Toronto man accused of plotting to join terrorist group, freed on bail



Mohamed Hersi (RIGHT) and his lawyer Anser Farooq (LEFT) leave the Brampton Superior Court after he was granted bail regarding charges of allegedly planning to join a Somali group associated with al-Qaida.

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Megan O'Toole Apr 29, 2011 - 7:23 PM ET

A Toronto man accused of plotting to join a Somali terrorist group strode out of a Brampton courthouse Friday, freed on bail in a case his lawyer says the Crown should consider dropping.

Mohamed Hersi, grinning broadly, embraced friends and family members outside court and made a brief statement to the assembled media, with lawyer Anser Farooq at his side.

"I'm just happy to be out and be with my family," Mr. Hersi said, clad in a black suit and pale dress shirt. "It's a beautiful day and it's great to be with my family and the comfort of my relatives."

Mr. Hersi, 25, stands charged with two terrorism offences, including attempting to participate in a terrorist group and counselling another person to do the same. He was arrested a month ago at Pearson airport, where he had been waiting to board a flight to Cairo.

Police allege the Egyptian capital would have been his first stop en route to Somalia to join al-Shabab, an al-Qaeda-linked group that is on Canada's list of banned terrorist organizations.

Details of Friday's ruling, including the reasons provided by Justice of the Peace Hilda Weiss for granting bail, were covered by a sweeping publication ban. Mr. Hersi stood, expressionless, as the ruling came down; as the packed courtroom emptied into the hall, his friends and family members hugged each other.

Total bail was set at \$200,000, and as a condition of release, Mr. Hersi must be in the company of one of his sureties at all times, except during private consultations with his lawyer. He has also been banned from applying for a passport, possessing firearms and accessing the Internet.

"It was a very well-reasoned and thoughtful decision. We're obviously very pleased," Mr. Farooq said, noting bail was a critical first step for his client.

"Once you've got bail, you've got the whole world in front of you," he said. "I would certainly hope that the Crown re-evaluates the case that they have [to] see if this is a prosecution worth pursuing."

Crown attorney Iona Jaffe said she was not surprised by the ruling, adding the sureties put forth by Mr. Hersi were "very competent."

Mr. Hersi's arrest was the result of a six-month investigation called Project Severe, which began when his employer, a security firm, became concerned about his online activities and contacted police. Mr. Hersi ultimately left his job to prepare for a trip overseas.

In announcing the charges last month, the RCMP and Toronto police deemed the spread of al-Qaeda beliefs into Canada a serious concern.

Al-Shabab, which is fighting to overthrow Somalia's United Nations-backed government to establish an Islamic state, was banned by Ottawa as a terrorist organization last year amid concerns the group was attempting to radicalize and recruit young Somali Canadians. The group's online propaganda mixes religious messages with rap music.

Mr. Hersi is scheduled to return to court May 26.

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