

Wednesday, December 5, 2007

Praised be Abdul Rahman al-Lahem

Â In theÂ United States, financial opportunity costsÂ (and rejections from short-supply and often low-paying public interest jobs) are about the only thing preventing a lawyer fromÂ doing social justice and pro bono work and, if the lawyer wishes, to criticize the judiciary in the process (of course, the legal ethics enforcers will sometimes claim that such criticism violates lawyers' ethical rules, but praised be the First Amendment for limiting such enforcement efforts). Â Perhaps the plight of Saudi lawyer Abdul Rahman al-Lahem will inspire lawyers to be more willing to take personal and financial risks and sacrifices to work for social justice, when seeing that Mr. al-Lahem goes one step further by risking his law license in the process of very vocally representing, pro bono, the woman sentenced to six months in jail and 200 lashes after being gang-raped after not following Saudi Arabia's prohibition against women being alone with unrelated men, and not staying quiet about it. Â To pay his bills, Mr. al-Lahem does commercial work. To feed his conscience, he takes pro bono cases defending social justice in a nation lagging far behind the social justice situation in the United States, which itself has severe social justice deficits. Â Mr. al-Lahem -- who has previously been jailed for his vocal human rightsÂ work -- came onÂ the human rights soapbox scene at least a few years beforeÂ defending this rape victim, which might explain what drewÂ this current worldwide high-profile client to him.Â If his voice for human rights is an oasis in an oppressive kingdom, hopefully what he calls his generation of lawyers has members joining that oasis. Â Today, Mr. al-Lahem is scheduled "to appear before a disciplinary committee on 5 December 2007 for publicly criticising his client's unfair treatment by the judiciary." Unable to find Mr. al-Lahem's contact information in Google and Martindale.com, I have asked two Saudi lawyers, listed as including criminal practice -- as well as Amnesty International --Â if they have his contact information, so that I may add my voice of support for him if he wishes it. Â Making Mr. al-Lahem a particularly able advocate for human rights is his metamorphosis from supporting the Saudi government's strict interpretation and application of Islamic law, to deciding byÂ the time he attended law school thatÂ theÂ Wahhabi Islamic thought should not eclipse other interpretations of Islam. Â Mr. al-Lahem remains focused on continuing to fight for social justice. He isÂ a critical inspiration for social justice activists worldwide. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Constitutional Law at 00:00