

JAMAL SAYS HE TRUSTS COURTS TO CLEAR HIM

SOMALI ACTIVIST HELD IN IMMIGRATION CASE

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Body

Jailed **Somali activist** Omar **Jamal said** Tuesday he **trusted** the **courts** to **clear** him of charges that he broke **immigration** laws even as new questions about his legal status surfaced.

Jamal has been a frequent and outspoken critic of law enforcement treatment of fellow refugees over the past 18 months. On Monday, federal **immigration** agents arrested him outside his St. Paul home on six counts of making false statements when he applied for asylum five years ago this week in Memphis, Tenn.

Contrary to the suspicions some Somalis and other supporters have expressed since his arrest, **Jamal said** he did not believe the charges stemmed from his high-profile, often confrontational style of activism. He **said** he intended to resume his work as executive director of the St. Paul-based **Somali** Justice Advocacy Center as soon as possible.

"I deeply **trust** the system," **Jamal said** during a telephone interview from the Washington County jail. "They have some serious concerns of my background, which they have a right to do. I think the system will eventually exonerate me. ... I am not being targeted because of what I do. They are just doing their job. I am doing my job."

Jamal has focused much of his energy recently on decrying federal efforts to deport Somalis convicted of criminal or **immigration** violations to their lawless homeland, which has been without a central government since civil war broke out in 1991. Such deportations have been on hold across the country since January, when a federal judge in Seattle issued a nationwide ban on removing Somalis at least until their country has a functioning central government.

Jamal, 30, declined to discuss his **immigration** status, **saying** he was acting on his lawyer's advice. A federal judge in Minneapolis released **Jamal** after a brief hearing on his criminal **case** Monday. Agents immediately took him to the U.S. Bureau of **Immigration** and Customs Enforcement offices in Bloomington to face administrative charges for alleged violations of **immigration** law.

According to Department of Justice documents outlining those charges, authorities are seeking to remove **Jamal** from the United States for violations that include failing to prove how he entered the country.

Jamal also allegedly failed to possess valid travel or identity documents when he entered and allegedly sought entry or **immigration** benefits by fraud, both of which are circumstances that would have made him inadmissible, authorities **say** in a notice ordering **Jamal** to appear before an **immigration** judge.

A **Somali** native who is not a U.S. citizen, **Jamal** allegedly arrived in Toronto in November 1989, applied for and received refugee status. He allegedly was granted Canadian immigrant status in December 1991.

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In April 1998, while applying for asylum in Memphis, **Jamal** allegedly failed to disclose his Canadian immigrant status, according to the notice. At the same time, he also allegedly claimed membership in a clan different from the one identified in paperwork he allegedly submitted to the Canadian **Immigration** and Refugee Board.

Authorities also allege **Jamal**, who has a wife and three children, claimed that he had been admitted to the United States at New York on a tourist visa.

"You have not submitted to the United States **Immigration** and Naturalization Service any document establishing your time, place and manner of entry and INS has no record of your alleged Oct. 20, 1997, admission," the notice alleges.

Richard Breitman, a Bloomington-based **immigration** lawyer, **said Jamal's case** appears to be an exception to standard practice in at least one instance, Breitman **said, saying** he had rarely seen authorities pursue criminal charges in addition to administrative charges in such matters.

"I've just never seen it in 20 years, to criminally prosecute an asylum applicant," Breitman **said**. "He's been found to be a person fearing persecution in a country that is very dangerous, particularly for someone like he is, very active politically or publicly as an advocate."

Todd Nelson can be reached at tanelson@pioneerpress.com or (651) 228-5575.

Graphic

Photo

Omar **Jamal**

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