Jordan: No deal made with Israel

Hussein visits freed Hamas founder

By Jamal Halaby
Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan – King Hussein denied reports Thursday that Israel released the founder of the militant Hamas movement as part of a swap for two alleged Israeli secret agents jailed in Jordan.

"There is no deal. A deal is usually this for that. None of this has happened," Hussein said after visiting Sheik Ahmed Yassin in an Amman hospital, along with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Yassin, 61, who is quadriplegic and nearly blind, was freed Wednesday from Israel's Ayalon Prison in a wheelchair and flown to Amman.

Yassin's lawyer said Thursday that his client would return to his Gaza Strip home after recuperating in Jordan.

The statement was the clearest indication yet that Israel will allow the Hamas leader to return to his homeland. Yassin's return is a highly sensitive issue among his followers, who would be enraged if he is forced to stay out of Palestinian territories.

Yassin has written documentation "from Israeli authorities that his release was not a deportation and that he will be allowed to return to his home in the Gaza Strip," Abdel Malik Dahamshe, an Israeli Arab on the Palestinian legislative council, told the Associated Press.

Dahamshe said the Israeli document was signed by the commander of the Israeli army's southern region.

Yassin had served eight years of a life term for ordering the killings of Israeli soldiers and Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.

Israel radio described Yassin's release as part of a swap for two suspected Israeli secret service agents who are jailed in Jordan for the attempted assassination of another Hamas leader, Khalid Mashaal, in Amman last week.

But Jordan's state minister for Canadian passports, attacked Mashaal as he entered his Amman office, injecting him with a toxic substance. Mashaal was discharged Thursday after being hospitalized for eight days with breathing problems doctors blamed on the poison. He was taken to an undisclosed safe house.

Before his release, Mashaal said, "It is evident that the Israeli Mossad wanted to get rid of me." He added that the attack will not deter "us from continuing our struggle."

Canada, meanwhile, said it is recalling its ambassador to Israel to protest the use of forged Canadian passports in the apparent assassination attempt.

Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said Thursday that Canada had determined the passports were forged and that neither of the men was a Canadian national.

The two men were carrying Canadian passports which identified them as Shawn Kendall, 28, and Barry Beads, 36, according to Jordanian police documents transliterated from Arabic.

Axworthy, in New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly debate, spoke to Israel's deputy foreign minister to relay word of the Canadian protest. He was to meet later with the Jordanian foreign minister.

Axworthy said Israeli agents using forged Canadian passports put Canadian travelers at risk in the Middle East. Canada will recall its ambassador to Israel for "consultations" in protest, Axworthy said.

Axworthy said Canada takes "great exception to the use of the reputation of Canadian passports for those kinds of purposes."

According to Canadian reports, Israel had promised to bar agents from its Mossad spy agency from using Canadian passports after they were caught doing so in 1981.

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