

## NABIL HADJARAB

**“Brilliant artist, keen footballer, sweet kid.”<sup>1</sup>**

**The French family of a Guantánamo prisoner, cleared for release since 2007, urges the French Government to help him return to the country he grew up in and loves.**



Date of Birth: 21 July 1979 (30 years old)

Place of Birth: Algeria

Languages: English, French and Arabic

Family Status: Single

Personal Interests: Languages, Art and Drawing, Football

Nabil as a young teenager

### Summary

Nabil Hadjarab longs to come home to France, where he grew up. He has spent over eight long years in Guantánamo Bay. He has never been charged with any crime nor had a trial. He has been cleared for release since 2007, when American officials confirmed he presented no threat to anyone. Long before that, his American interrogators told him his identity had been confused with that of another man and that his detention was a mistake. Yet he remains in Guantánamo.

Nabil’s family have long served France, risking their lives for the country. Nabil’s father Saïd, dutifully fought for France in the French Algerian war. Nabil’s brother Hakim won a national medal of honour when he served in the French Army. Now the Hadjarab family is calling on the French government to acknowledge these sacrifices by doing the right thing and bringing Nabil home.

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<sup>1</sup> This is how Nabil was described to one of Reprive’s attorneys by a guard in Guantánamo Bay.

## Biography

Nabil was born in Algeria on 21 July 1979, but moved to France when he was just a baby. His father, Saïd Hadjarab, was born in Algeria in the 1930s, and moved to France in 1954. After living there for two years he was called up to do military service, aged 21, and dutifully fought for France in the French Algerian war. Afterwards, Said settled in Lyon, where he ran a small café and started a family. Nabil has seven half-brothers and sisters from his father's first marriage; all are French citizens, and hope for Nabil's safe return. One of them, Hakim Hadjarab, won a national medal of honour when he served in the French Army. He has expressed a particularly strong desire to support Nabil upon his return.

Nabil was the only child of Said's second marriage and the only one who does not hold French citizenship. Nabil's early years were not easy. Said's personal problems led to Nabil being the victim of neglect and abuse. Things became so bad that he was placed in a foster family when he was two and a half. He lived with his foster family until the age of nine. He remembers this time as the happiest of his life – he enjoyed time with his foster family and flourished at his primary school in Savigny. He has repeatedly stated that he feels much more cultural affinity with Europe than North Africa; Nabil has no strong connection or support structure in Algeria.

When Nabil was nine years old, his father reappeared, and took him back with him to Algeria. Nabil continued his education in Algiers, but in 1994 tragedy struck when his father died of cancer. Although Nabil was taken in by an aunt in Algeria, she proved to be abusive. At this point, Nabil's uncle, Mr. Ahmad Hadjarab, intervened.

Ahmad Hadjarab was born in Algeria in 1944 and moved to France in 1961. He has lived in France with his family ever since, and became a French citizen more than ten years ago. He has worked all his life for well-known French companies such as *Berliet* and, latterly, as a welder at the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN). When Ahmad learned of Nabil's struggles in Algeria, he was determined to help his nephew, whom he regards as his own son. He started sending him what money he could spare to help him find his feet.

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Jon Snow and Marina Warner.

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When Nabil turned twenty-one, in 2000, he returned to France to be reunited with his siblings, his uncle and his foster family. Later that year Nabil sought legal advice and attempted to obtain French residency. After gathering the relevant documentation, Nabil's immigration lawyers advised him that the review of his application would take up to six months to complete. Nabil worried deeply that he could be found living undocumented, would be deported and barred from returning.

Nabil's friends advised him to go to the UK, that it would be easier to find work and live undocumented there. It was bad advice, but Nabil headed to England anyway. He lived there for a few months but with no national insurance number, no-one would hire him full-time.

Living in constant fear of deportation in the UK, Nabil heard he could live in Afghanistan without papers, and decided to go there to study. In late March 2001, he travelled to Kabul, where he was given the name of an Algerian man who kindly took him in. Within a few months everything changed. The attacks of 9/11 brought Afghanistan to the world's attention. The US invaded in November 2001.

### **Seizure and Imprisonment**

In the midst of this war reports began to circulate that the Northern Alliance was rounding up and killing Arabs. In fear, Nabil and his housemates fled to Jalalabad. When Jalalabad too seemed unsafe, they fled to the mountains outside the city. The US airforce was bombing all the main roads leading toward safety in Pakistan. Nabil stayed in the mountains for a few weeks, hoping the danger would ease. Unfortunately it didn't. Feeling he could wait no longer, Nabil attempted to reach the border. However, he was wounded by a bomb and ended up in hospital in Jalalabad.

From his hospital bed, Nabil was sold to US military forces for a bounty. Bounties of \$5000 (a many times the average annual Afghan incomes) were being offered for foreign Arabs found in the region. He had never attended a training camp, nor had ever had anything to do with terrorism, yet Nabil was sold to the Americans and shipped to the US run prison at Kandahar airport. He explained repeatedly that he was innocent. He strenuously denied the accusations levelled at him, which were

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based on the interrogations and forced confessions of other prisoners. Nabil knew that his was a case of mistaken identity. Several US interrogators told him the same thing.

Unfortunately, the US high command, in its clumsy and misguided response to 9/11, demanded that every Arab who ended up in US custody should be sent to Guantánamo Bay, regardless of the quality of evidence against them. Shackled, bound and hooded, Nabil was flown to Cuba in early 2002.

In April 2007, after more than five years of illegal imprisonment, Nabil was cleared for release. The Administrative Review Board found that Nabil was not an 'enemy combatant.'

During almost eight years in prison at Guantánamo, Nabil has been subjected to all kinds of torture and inhuman treatment: sleep and sensory deprivation, temperature extremes and prolonged isolation. He has spent years with little or no access to sunlight, recreation or medical care, in a tiny, windowless, steel cell. He has never been permitted a family visit. He has spoken with his loved ones on the phone only three times. To this day, Nabil understandably finds it extremely difficult to talk about his mistreatment in Guantánamo. Yet his comportment whilst illegally imprisoned has been outstanding. A guard in Guantánamo described him to our lawyers as "a brilliant artist, a keen footballer, and a sweet kid."

### **Hopes of returning to France**

Nabil deeply wishes to return to France so that he can quietly rebuild his life and be reunited with his family. In France he has a loving uncle and aunt, both of whom care for him deeply and pray for his return.

Nabil dreams of finding work as an interpreter or translator, using his excellent linguistic skills: he speaks English, French and Arabic fluently. He would also love to get married and have children.

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Reprieve hopes that France will give Nabil Hadjarab the opportunity to restart his life. He has been illegally incarcerated for over eight years. Yet the French government has so far failed to act on his behalf. Now, surely, is the time for France to look after a man whose history makes him more French than his passport implies. He would be forever grateful for France's hospitality were he to return to the country he loves. It is time his ordeal was over.

**For further information please contact Katherine O'Shea at Reprieve's Press Office in London [Katherine.oshea@reprieve.org.uk](mailto:Katherine.oshea@reprieve.org.uk) +44 (0)207 427 1099.**

*Reprieve*, a legal action charity, uses the law to enforce the human rights of prisoners, from death row to Guantánamo Bay. Reprieve investigates, litigates and educates, working on the frontline, to provide legal support to prisoners unable to pay for it themselves. Reprieve promotes the rule of law around the world, securing each person's right to a fair trial and saving lives. Clive Stafford Smith is the founder of Reprieve and has spent 25 years working on behalf of people facing the death penalty in the USA.

Reprieve's current casework involves representing 21 prisoners in the US prison at Guantánamo Bay, working on behalf of prisoners facing the death penalty, and conducting ongoing investigations into the rendition and the secret detention of 'ghost prisoners' in the so-called 'war on terror.'

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