

DIPLOMATIC CROSSFIRE

Canadian caught in visa spat wants hostility to end

Businessman turned away by UAE wants to meet with Prime Minister, says animosity puts millions at stake

JOE FRIESEN

The businessman turned away by the United Arab Emirates over a visa flap returned to Canada determined to meet Prime Minister Stephen Harper and insist that Canada end diplomatic hostilities between the two countries.

Darius Mosun, CEO of an architectural construction firm, is calling for a meeting with Mr. Harper to emphasize the need to get relations with Canada's largest Middle East trading partner back on track. He said millions of dollars are at stake.

"How is it that we got to the point that Canadians are being singled out?" Mr. Mosun said in an interview Sunday. "When you're standing in a line with Americans and Europeans and they pull you aside because they see you're holding a Canadian passport, it's embarrassing. It's unCanadian. I don't like it. I'm not going to stand for it and I'm not going to put up with it."

Mr. Mosun was denied entry to the UAE at Abu Dhabi's airport last Friday and forced to spend the night in the terminal before flying home to Canada. He was told by immigration officials in the UAE that his visa was a single-entry visa only. It expired when he left the UAE last week for a brief side trip to Saudi Arabia. Mr. Mosun said he had no idea that was the case. The visa document bears no indication that it is good for only one entry.

Relations between Canada and the UAE soured last autumn when Canada denied the request from UAE air carriers for extended landing rights at Toronto's Pearson International airport. The UAE responded by kicking the Canadian military out of its staging base near Dubai, used to supply the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. Visas became mandatory for Canadian travellers in January. The visas range in price from \$250 for a 30-day visa to \$1,000 for a six-month multiple-entry visa.

Mr. Mosun said he will be calling the Prime Minister's Office this week to ask for a meeting. He also wrote to International Trade Minister Peter Van Loan several weeks ago, he said, asking for a meeting to discuss relations with the UAE. In the letter, he said he was upset about the new visa requirements and also wanted to see the UAE's air carriers allowed to offer more flights out of Toronto. The minister has not replied, Mr. Mosun said.

"The people that I see and meet on my travels in that part of the world are wise, highly educated and reasonable. If we polarize people ... without understanding them, respecting them, showing them the patience and grace of being Canadian, it is going to cost us," he said. "This is a matter that is apolitical."

"I truly believe that the way these things are being handled is not right."

His firm, Soheil Mosun Limited, specializes in high end architectural projects, having recently built the Wheel of Conscience memorial, designed by Daniel Libeskind, at the Pier 21 immigration museum in Halifax.

Mr. Mosun said the way Canadians are now treated in the UAE has changed dramatically. On his most recent visit, he said Canadians were selected for special security screening that included retinal scans, which were not required for visitors from the U.S. or Western Europe.

Mr. Mosun said the importance of good relations with the UAE will be magnified in the coming years as wealth concentrates in the Middle East. The necessity of obtaining a visa for each visit makes Canadian companies less competitive in the UAE, he said.

"Why are we insulting these people? Why are we causing them to retaliate?" he said. "They're our number one trading partner in the Middle East. Why aren't we doing something about it?"



Darius Mosun recently got caught in the crossfire of the diplomatic war between Canada and the United Arab Emirates. JENNIFER ROBERTS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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