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**HEADLINE:** Egyptian religious leader denied Canadian visa: Ghoniem may have terrorist connections, immigration officials say

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**BODY:**

An Egyptian revered as a religious leader and speaker in the international Islamic community may be a member of a terrorist organization, a Canadian immigration spokesman in Windsor says.

Wagdy Ghoniem also provided conflicting information to immigration officials and a visa officer at the Canadian Consulate in Detroit, which is why he was denied entry to Canada, said Gerald Belanger, manager of immigration's ports of entry operations in Windsor.

Members of the Islamic community in Detroit, Windsor and Toronto have expressed outrage and embarrassment over the way Mr. Ghoniem, who is on a speaking tour in the U.S., was treated when he tried to enter Canada with a visitor's visa issued by the consulate in Detroit.

But Mr. Belanger said immigration officials were justified in detaining Mr. Ghoniem overnight in jail until he could be interviewed by a member of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service on Thursday.

"Our (computerized information) system indicated he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas" -- both known terrorist organizations, Mr. Belanger said.

It also showed Mr. Ghoniem had been denied a visitor's visa by the Canadian Embassy in Cairo in May 1993.

Mr. Belanger would not reveal the source of immigration's information about Mr. Ghoniem's terrorist connections, but said that it didn't need to be confirmed to deny him access to Canada.

"I am not a terrorist," Mr. Ghoniem said. He refused to tell immigration and CSIS officials if he worked for opposition parties in Egypt, Mr. Belanger said.

Mr. Ghoniem said he withdrew his visa application to the embassy in Cairo in May 1993 because officials were giving him too many hassles.

His supporters point to the fact that Mr. Ghoniem has a valid visitor's visa for the U.S., known to be vigilantly on the lookout for members of terrorist organizations.

They say he is a non-violent man who has been maligned by the Egyptian government for speaking out against corruption, though Mr. Ghoniem says he doesn't speak against the government.

He told Canadian immigration officials he has been arrested six times by the secret service

branch of the Egyptian police and jailed for three to five months each time. An accountant with the Egyptian finance ministry, he continued to receive his salary while in jail, he said.

"It was just their way of controlling me," he said.

Mr. Ghoniem, 46, signed a release form Friday allowing Mr. Belanger to discuss his case.

He told the visa officer at the consulate he wanted to enter Canada to visit Niagara Falls and would only lecture if asked. Immigration officials were told by a Toronto lawyer, who was visited by a large number of Mr. Ghoniem's supporters, that he was to give a series of lectures in Toronto and, possibly, Montreal, Mr. Belanger said.

Mr. Ghoniem told the visa officer at the Canadian Consulate he was visiting a cousin in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Later, he told immigration officials that he was on a lecture tour that included stops in San Diego, Los Angeles, New York, Washington and Detroit, where he spoke to audiences of 2,000 to 4,000 people.

"When there's a lot of conflicting information, it's difficult for us to tell if the person is telling the truth," Mr. Belanger said. On those grounds, Mr. Ghoniem was deemed inadmissible and his visa was withdrawn.

Canadian consulate officials didn't have the information about Mr. Ghoniem's alleged membership in terrorist groups because it is under a different version of his name than he put on his visa application, he said.

All versions of Mr. Ghoniem's name are in his passport, which both the consulate and immigration officials saw, said Hussein El-Hennawy, an executive member of the Muslim Arab Youth Association, which sponsored Mr. Ghoniem's lecture tour.

There was no intention to mislead anyone, said Mr. El-Hennawy, who lives in Toronto and had invited Mr. Ghoniem to extend his lecture tour to Canada.

"He is a very reasonable person," Mr. El-Hennawy said. "He's a very nice person. He's a very soft-spoken person. He teaches people to be peaceful.

"I think everybody is very disgusted with what happened and how he was treated," he said.

"All indications are it's politically inspired" by the Egyptian government to punish Mr. Ghoniem for speaking out against corruption, said Imtiaz Ahmad, senior vice-president and former president of the Islamic Society of North America.

"Whatever has happened is highly questionable and very degrading to a human being," said Ahmad, who lives in Windsor.

Mr. El-Hennawy said his group plans to protest to the Canadian government. Mr. Ghoniem was expected to fly back to Egypt on Monday.