

Group aids imprisoned man

Palestinian ends his hunger strike

BY CAROLINE FRYAR
STAFF WRITER

BUTNER — One day after a former professor, jailed for his connections with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, ended his two-month hunger strike, supporters gathered to express solidarity.

The protest, a response to the four-year-long imprisonment of Sami Al-Arian, a Palestinian and former University of South Florida professor, took place Saturday near the federal medical prison where he is being held.

In front of a brightly colored replica of the Statue of Liberty, about 100 people held signs in support of Al-Arian.

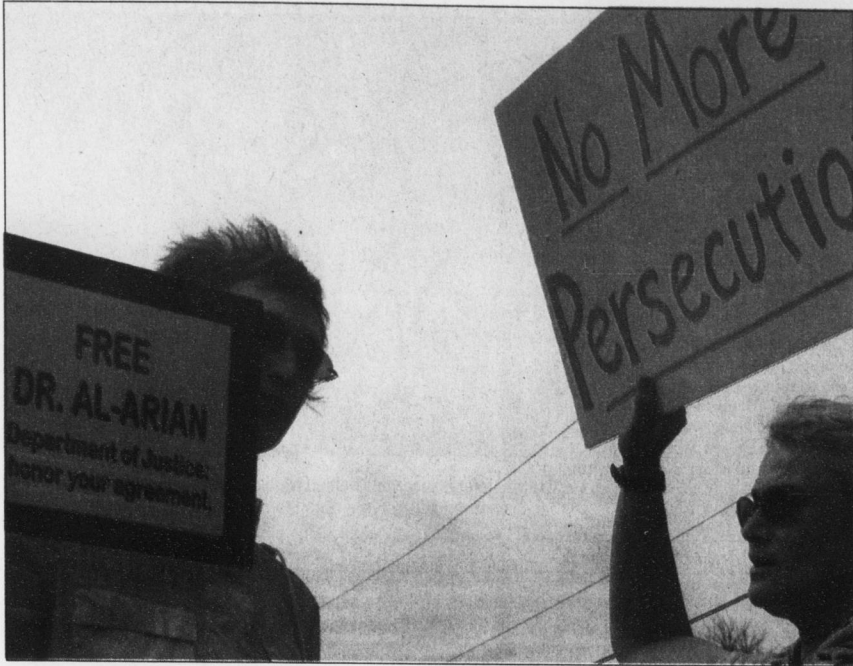
"We're out here trying to raise local awareness. This is happening in our own backyard," said Karen Booth, a UNC women's studies professor.

Al-Arian is being held in contempt of court, for which he can be held indefinitely, for refusing to testify in a Virginia case involving several Palestinian charities, said Sarah Shields, a UNC history professor who has followed and written about the case.

"This was going to be the show trial for the Patriot Act, and it's been a big embarrassment to the U.S. government," she said.

Al-Arian resumed eating on Friday after losing more than 50 pounds, said Nahla Al-Arian, his wife, who was at the protest organized by N.C. Stop Torture Now, the bill of rights defense committees of Orange and Durham counties, and the N.C. Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation.

"His children and I convinced him that his message had been heard, that we would continue to fight for him," she said.



Lisa Marcusson, left, a member of Progressive Democrats of America, and Gabrielle Tarrazi, a member of Coalition for Peace with Justice, protest the imprisonment of Sami Al-Arian on Saturday in Butner.

A federal appeals court affirmed the contempt ruling on Friday.

"Because of the atmosphere of intimidation, we expected this, we were not optimistic" Nahla Al-Arian said, adding that there still was a possibility that her husband would begin another hunger strike.

Al-Arian was charged in 2003 with 17 counts revolving around his alleged communications with a terrorist group named Palestinian Islamic Jihad. He also is accused of leading that group.

He pled guilty to conspiring to aid the group in exchange for the government dropping the remain

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charges.

Al-Arian maintains that he did not agree to cooperate in further investigations in the written plea agreement.

Henry Morgenstern, president of counter-terrorism group Security Solutions International, said Al-Arian is using the legal system to avoid punishment for

his crimes.

"This guy is playing a game."

He added that said Al-Arian's supporters were misguided.

"As far as I'm concerned, you can put him away forever," he said, adding that he believed Al-Arian would be set free as a result of the attention the case has gathered.

Nahla Al-Arian said that despite her husband's troubles, the activist support is encouraging.

"What's happening to us shows what's worst about America and what's best."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Bills seek to curtail danger from cigarettes

May ban public use, raise taxes

BY ROBIN BURK
STAFF WRITER

North Carolinians could see higher cigarette taxes and more smoke-free areas if the N.C. General Assembly passes a wave of smoking bills filed for the 2007-08 session.

Legislators' proposals include increasing cigarette taxes, banning smoking in public places and businesses and allowing local governments to regulate smoking.

One bill introduced by Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, would benefit the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center through a 2-cent tax on each cigarette sold.

If passed, the tax likely would raise \$30 to \$35 million each year, Rand said.

One-eighth of the funds raised would go to the center, and the remainder would contribute to the N.C. general fund, he said.

"We are well along now with the plans to build the new cancer hospital, and we need to do all we can to make sure that we have the resources necessary," Rand said.

"Additional funds for research are badly needed."

No date has been set for a vote, but he said the Senate will decide on the tax during the 2007-08 session.

"There's still residual opposition to raising the cigarette tax, and we'll just have to see how it goes," he said.

"North Carolina was historically the home of the tobacco industry, so there you have it."

But he said the state's past should not prevent change.

"The world has moved on, and we need to move on with it," Rand said, adding that North Carolina's

cigarette taxes are lower than the national average.

But Kris Culin, a junior criminology major at N.C. State University, said the state's cigarette tax should remain at its current level.

"Everyone knows the hazards, so if you end up getting cancer from smoking, then someone else shouldn't have to pay for it," he said.

Rand's tax increase was proposed amid several tobacco-related suggestions, including a bill in the N.C. House that would ban smoking in many businesses and public areas.

The bill's stated goal is to protect people from secondhand smoke at work and in public places.

Rep. Bill McGee, R-Forsyth, said that health care providers have supported the measure but that many of his constituents have not.

"The majority of the people that I'm hearing from, and not all of them are smokers, not all of them have a job or relationship with the tobacco company here, are saying they do not want me to support this bill," he said.

"They want me to vote no on this legislation as it is currently being reported."

Amendments could be made to the bill, which is not yet on the floor, McGee said.

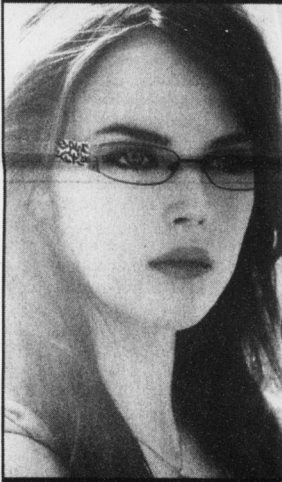
Rep. Larry Brown, R-Forsyth, said that while he generally supports non-smoking bills, businesses such as bars should not have to ban smoking.

Nevertheless, he said he was optimistic about the outcome of the legislation after some changes.

"In the end result, the bill will work out where it will be good for everybody."

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Fri., Mar. 30 @ 7 p.m.
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Hanes Art Center Auditorium with special guest, director Laura Poitras

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Sat., Apr. 14 @ 9:30 p.m.

Volver
Fri., Apr. 13 @ 10 p.m.
Sat., Apr. 14 @ 7 p.m.

Last King of Scotland
Fri., Apr. 20 @ 7 p.m.
Sat., Apr. 21 @ 9:30 p.m.

Dreamgirls
Fri., Apr. 20 @ 9:30 p.m.
Sat., Apr. 21 @ 7 p.m.

Stomp the Yard
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