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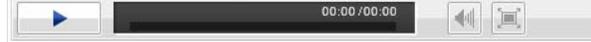
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Family grieving after tragedy in Mexican resort



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CTV.ca News Staff
Date: Wed. May. 9 2007 11:56 PM ET

The family of an Alberta man, left clinically brain dead after suffering what they say was a brutal beating in Mexico, will donate his organs in Canada.

Jeff Toews, 34, of Grande Prairie, Alta., was expected to arrive in Edmonton overnight on a chartered medivac flight, accompanied by his wife Natalie and brother Murray.

Mexican doctors have concluded that Toews was clinically brain dead as a result of his injuries.

"As of (Tuesday) night there is 100 per cent no life in Jeff's brain, so he's clinically brain dead," said Murray Toews, Jeff's brother, when reached by phone Wednesday in Cancun.

"We want to pull him to Alberta so we can make some decisions with Jeff's organs," said Toews. "It's (the family's) decision that they want his organs donated, so we need to keep him alive to get him out of the country."

Colleen Toews, Murray's wife, said Jeff will be re-assessed by doctors at the University of Alberta hospital in Edmonton. If the original diagnosis is correct, the family will have him removed from life support.

The Albertan was found grievously injured at the Moon Palace Golf and Spa Resort in Cancun early Monday.

Toews and his wife were vacationing in the region with nine other couples from northern Alberta on a seven-day holiday.

Before security guards found Toews on the golf course, he had been with the other couples at the resort's Andromeda nightclub. He travelled back and forth between the club and his room, until he failed to return after one such trip.

Mexican authorities say he sustained his injuries after falling from a second-floor balcony on the resort.

"I know for a fact he did not do this. This is my heart speaking," Gregg Toews told CTV News through tears.

Murray said it's a tragedy to see Jeff's life come to an end at a young age.

"There's no way on a holiday that a man should end up on a sidewalk like that," he told CTV News.

Toews' family maintains he was brutally beaten, possibly at the hands of hotel security guards, and they accuse Mexican authorities of covering up the crime.

Travel advisory needed?

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Meanwhile, the debate over whether Ottawa should issue an advisory against travel to the country has been reignited.

Ottawa has been "singularly ineffective" in dealing with cases of Canadians attacked in Mexico, Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh said Wednesday, as he called on Ottawa to be more vocal in pressing Mexican authorities to investigate these cases more aggressively.

"I know (Foreign Affairs Minister Peter) MacKay raised these issues when he was in Mexico last, because I was there with him, but obviously this seems to have no effect," Dosanjh, the Liberal foreign affairs critic, told CTV on Wednesday.

Dosanjh criticized Foreign Affairs for not issuing a travel warning on the consular affairs website.

"I think we need to provide some travel advisories to our own people and make them conscious of the fact that these kinds of possibilities exist," he said.

Dosanjh said there are a number of cases -- several of them serious -- that have not been investigated.

"I know people would argue that we are responsible ourselves when we travel abroad and we should be a little cautious ourselves, but this has been happening in Mexico all too often."

Bello Melchor Rodriguez y Carrillo, attorney-general for the state of Quintana Roo, agrees with Mexican authorities that Toews fell from a balcony.

"He wasn't beaten. He fell from a second storey of the hotel where he was staying," he told the Canadian Press on Tuesday.

"That's the report that we have from the security guard from the hotel, and the report we're getting from the hospital too."

Carrillo has also overseen the controversial Ianiero case, the Canadian couple murdered at another Mexican resort.

He has blamed two women from Thunder Bay, Ont. for the killings, despite heavy criticism.

Dosanjh says Mexican officials need to be respected but maintains authorities need to be more vigilant in their investigations.

"They are a sovereign state so to that extent you have to respect them, but the difficulty that we have experienced with this attorney-general is that he comes to conclusions without much investigation," Dosanjh said.

"He has done that instantaneously in this case as well. That must cause a great deal of anguish for the family," he said.

With a report from CTV's Denelle Balfour and files from the Canadian Press

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