

June 15, 2010

Custody dispute dad flees to Saudi Arabia with \$500,000 from Procter & Gamble

By Dan Horn
dhorn@enquirer.com

Talal Bawazir told a judge earlier this month he needed to move his children from Cincinnati to Saudi Arabia after his divorce because he couldn't provide for his family in the United States.

Now, he's in Saudi Arabia alone with \$500,000 that his wife says her four kids need to survive.

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/2010060/NEWS01/6060328> " target="_new">**The unusual custody battle between Bawazir and his wife**, Rima Shaheen, took a surprising turn last week when Bawazir flew to Saudi Arabia just days after his wife's lawyers learned of a \$500,000 severance payment from his former employer.

The move ended plans for a trial Tuesday to resolve the custody issues and prompted Shaheen's lawyers to demand Bawazir's arrest if he returns to the United States.

"There has been a massive fraud committed on this court," said Shaheen's attorney, Phyllis Bossin. "He has made a mockery of this court and all the while used the money for whatever he wanted."

Domestic Relations Judge Susan Laker Tolbert, who took over the case last week, set a new custody trial for July 1 and said the case would proceed with or without Bawazir.

The judge did not issue an arrest warrant for Bawazir because she said she wants him to return for the trial and with the money, which, under the law, is a marital asset that would be divided as part of any custody arrangement.

Until last week, Bawazir had argued that the children, who are U.S. citizens, should move with him to Saudi Arabia because he had no money and could only find a job in that country. He previously had worked in overseas assignments for Modern Products Co. and Procter & Gamble.

The previous judge on the case, Elizabeth Mattingly, encouraged Shaheen to at least consider a move to Saudi Arabia if her husband could not find work in the United States.

But Shaheen opposed the move, saying Islamic law in that country favored men and that he could prevent her from seeing her children if she followed him there. She also said she doubted her husband had been truthful about his finances or about trying to find a job in Cincinnati.

Bossin said she found proof Bawazir misled the court when she received information about a \$500,000 severance package from Procter & Gamble.

She said Bawazir wired the money to an account in Saudi Arabia and then pretended to take out loans from his father in Saudi Arabia to pay expenses and legal fees.

When he got caught, Bossin said, he fled the country and abandoned the custody battle for his children.

"What happened here is their father sneaked out of the country when his hand was caught in the cookie jar," Bossin said. "They have a mother who is left to pick up the pieces after their father left without saying goodbye. She's sitting here broke, trying to deal with their emotions."

She said Bawazir has continued to contact the children via e-mail and has made derogatory comments about his wife that are "toxic." She said his e-mails also blame the U.S. court system for forcing him to leave and tout Islamic law as his best chance for a fair hearing.

"There is no respect for this court," she said. "He says the American system is evil."

A court-appointed guardian for the children described both parents as "nice, good parents," but she said each seems determined to punish the other. Bawazir's previous attorney withdrew from the case and he did not have a lawyer in court Tuesday.

Tolbert stopped short of barring the father from contacting the children, but she did order both parents not to talk to the children about the case and not to disparage the other parent.

Bawazir, Shaheen and the children, who range in age from six to 14, have dual U.S.-Saudi citizenship but have lived most of their lives in the United States.