

B.C. asks France to return children

A Vancouver father has won three child custody judgements in Europe

Jeff Lee, Vancouver Sun

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The provincial government has asked France to return two children at the centre of a messy family child abduction case to their father, a British Columbia man.

On Thursday, the same day a Richmond Provincial Court judge remanded the children's mother, Nathalie Gettliffe-Grant in custody over child abduction charges, the Attorney-General's ministry sent a formal request to the French government requesting the children, Maximilien, 10, and Josephine, 12, be turned over to their father Scott Grant.

Gettliffe-Grant was arrested on April 10 at Vancouver International Airport when she returned to Vancouver to defend a doctoral thesis at the University of British Columbia. She fled to France with her children in August 2001 after a B.C. Supreme Court judge refused her request to take the children to visit their grandmother.

According to Grant, she surrendered her Canadian passport and the passports of her children, but two days later used new French passports to spirit herself and the children out of the country.

Grant took the abduction case to court in France, where he won three successive rulings, including one on Feb. 14 by the country's top court, that Gettliffe-Grant had breached the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and that the children should be returned to Canada.

It has become one of the longest parental child-abduction cases handled by the provincial office.

The mother now faces up to 10 years in jail in Canada on two criminal counts of child abduction.

On Thursday, Grant said he was awaiting word from France on whether he could retrieve the children.

"I'm just holding tight, waiting for word I can go and get them," he said. "I'll go at a moment's notice."

The case has taken on a nasty international flavour, with Grant being portrayed in France variously as a pedophile and a member of a cult, and the entire town where Gettliffe-Grant lived with her mother mobilized a vigilante force to protect the children from being returned to Canada.

A group, called "Let's Protect Maximilien and Josephine" set up surveillance of Grant when he returned to France in 2004 for one of the court cases, and he was the subject of newspaper articles and an investigative current-affairs television program that suggested the children would be brainwashed by his church. Two of the articles suggested the children were being "menaced" by a Canadian cult.

"I'm not a pedophile, I am a financial planner, for heaven's sake," Grant said during a court break. He said he's never been in trouble with the law and a psychological assessment done on him for the B.C. court raised no issues.

Grant, who said he has spent more than \$200,000 in legal fees, translation services and travel trying to be reunited with his children, said he became the victim of a vicious smear campaign in France because his ex-wife is a Catholic and he attends a different church, the Vancouver Church of Christ.

The Vancouver church is linked to the International Church of Christ, a U.S.-based organization that was alleged in the 1990s to operate like a cult. However, Grant said he's attended the Vancouver church for five years and is not involved in any "subversive" activities. The church, he said acts like a Protestant church.

"We don't put our hands up and talk in tongues and stuff like that," he said. "It's just an ordinary church."

Gettliffe-Grant, who speaks fluent English, was arrested by Canada Border Security agents after Grant noticed on a UBC website that she was to defend a French-language doctoral thesis on Wednesday at the university's French, Italian and Hispanic Studies department.

"I called the police and the lawyer for the Hague Convention, and told them she was planning to be here," he said. "But they said to calm down, she probably wouldn't show up because no one that smart would be that dumb to come here where there was a warrant for her arrest. But she did show up."

Gettliffe-Grant's bail application has been put over until April 19.

Grant said he's seen the children four times since they were abducted in 2001. Three of the times were brief, but last fall lawyers with the Hague Convention worked out a deal for them to spend five days together.

"They are great kids, and we get along well," he said. "I am really looking forward to seeing them."

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<http://www.canada.com/victoriatimescolonist/news/story.html?id=255859de-7c92-4173-bd1a-6f36a42a0d00&k=5124>