

Morocco Depports

Christian Family

Story by Debra Smith

Photos courtesy of the Padilla family



Morocco

The Padillas' home, center, was in central Morocco, North Africa.

On Sunday, March 7, 2010, a police car pulled up outside Eddie and Lynn Padilla's house near Ain Leuh, Morocco. "The vehicle stayed all night," said Eddie. "It was positioned so the officer could watch all the houses around him, and no one could leave." The next day, the Padillas and their 14 international co-workers were expelled from the nation.

Eddie and Lynn, houseparents at the Village of Hope (VOH) children's home, had lived in Morocco for nearly four years. They and several other couples from various nations cared for 33 abandoned children, one of whom was disabled. The VOH families had committed to raise the children until grown. "Our desire was to give these kids hope for the future," Lynn said. "In this country, there is very little hope for these children." The Padillas parented two Moroccan boys and their biological son and daughter.

The children's home carefully observed government regulations and had operated for 10 years without conflict with authorities. VOH strictly forbade violating the nation's laws against proselytization; and all along, said Eddie, "We had been up front. The government knew we were Christians."

Officials came yearly to inspect the home, so Eddie said authorities' visit on Saturday March 6 appeared routine. But the next day, officers returned and interviewed children. Then they confiscated the internationals' passports and residency papers, and police soon arrived to monitor VOH all night.

Houseparents were interviewed again on Monday. In the afternoon, the entire international staff was summoned and informed that they had been charged with the crime of proselytizing minors—and were being deported. There were no details regarding the accusations: Who had allegedly proselytized, and when? Someone burst into the meeting and announced that officials were simultaneously informing the children at the school on the other end of the compound. The houseparents rushed over; "Everybody was in hysterics," said Eddie. "Neighbors had heard what was happening



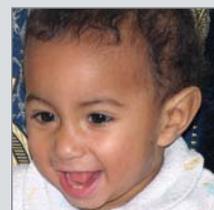
Houseparents Eddie and Lynn Padilla with their two biological children (on right) and two Moroccan foster sons. The couple was deported for alleged proselytism.

and come; people were crying; the owner of our apartment was so ashamed at what his government was doing."

The internationals initially got the impression they had a few days to prepare to depart. Brokenhearted and in shock, the Padillas went home and began to pack. Their director soon called to inform them: "They're not giving us a few days; they're giving us a few hours." That evening, their foster son Samir's second birthday, the police escorted the group to the airport. "We didn't even get to give him his birthday present," said Eddie.

Eddie and Lynn, Americans from Calvary Chapel Downey, CA, met in 1996 while training for a trip to Morocco. "It seemed like our whole courtship was focused on moving to Morocco," Eddie said. After marrying in 1998, the Padillas led trips to the North African nation over the course of seven years. "We wanted to be houseparents all along," remembered Eddie. "There's such a huge need because there are so many abandoned children." Eddie explained that when an unmarried Moroccan girl becomes pregnant, "According to Islamic law, the family's eldest son can kill her. So many girls run away and then abandon the baby." The family moved to Morocco in 2006, while Lynn was pregnant with their second child.

Eddie, Lynn, and their biological children are now in Colorado adjusting to American life and seeking to regain access to their foster



Samir and Mohcine were 2 and 1 when their foster parents were expelled.

children. Most of their colleagues are in Europe, where they continue to request that their deportation be revoked. International news has spotlighted the case, and the European Union sent a letter of appeal to the Moroccan government. The Padillas have been informed that the VOH children continue to live on the compound—but in unsatisfactory conditions and care—and that local Christians are currently imprisoned in connection with the case. Eddie said, "To me, it's like in the Scriptures when Rachel was crying for her children and wouldn't allow herself to be comforted [Matthew 2:18]. We're trying to deal with our grief, and we're asking why it all happened. Our pastor here, Ed Taylor of CC Aurora, said, 'Those are good questions, and God hasn't given us the answers.' God is still in control, but it happened." 🙏

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