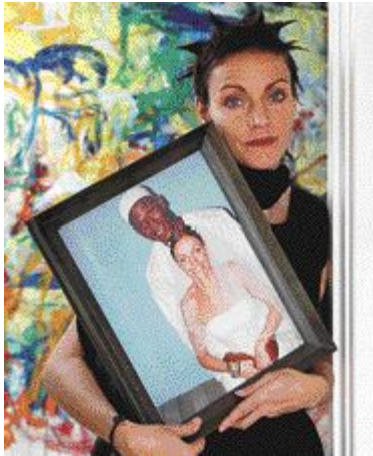


## **'Scammed' wife testifies at hearing**

### **Immigration board member reserves decision**

By Tom Spears, The Ottawa Citizen March 20, 2009



**Elaine 'Lainie' Towell testified Thursday that Fode Mohamed Soumah, seen here in their 2007 wedding photo, admitted fathering a child with a 15-year-old dancer in Africa.**

### **Photograph by: Pat McGrath, The Ottawa Citizen, The Ottawa Citizen**

Fode Mohamed Soumah packed his bags, left his wedding ring on the dresser and left his new wife and their Ottawa home less than a month after she helped him come to Canada. He didn't say goodbye or leave a forwarding address.

From that day in early 2008, the story takes two paths.

He and his lawyer say Elaine ("Lainie") Towell beat him out of jealousy, smashing their framed wedding photo over his head and slapping him once in the face. He left for Montreal to give her time to cool down.

She says he hit the road after she found out he had recently fathered a baby with a 15-year-old girl in the African nation of Guinea, where he came from, and she says she smashed the wedding photo on the floor.

Now it's up to a member of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to decide whether this was a callous immigration scam (her view) or a tale of love gone wrong (his).

Soumah testified in January. On Thursday, his wife took her turn.

She's a dancer and had travelled to Guinea several times to study dance. She met Soumah, a drummer in the ballet troupe. They fell in love and were married in 2007.

He didn't mention it at the time, but, between her visits to Africa, he had a brief affair with a 15-year-old dancer, who later had a baby boy. Days after the newlyweds came to Canada in January 2008, Towell found e-mails revealing the baby's existence.

She testified he admitted fathering the child. They argued, heatedly, and he left town. She says she desperately wanted him back, but he was gone for good, leaving her on the hook, as his sponsor, to repay the government for any money he received if he went on welfare.

That was when she went to immigration authorities and, later, to the media, MPs, and lawyers.

Towell came under attack from Soumah's lawyer yesterday. Why would she go public, Achille Kabongo asked.

"When I reported my case to Immigration, they told me that marriage fraud happens all the time and there was nothing they could do," she said. "I was the victim of a scam, and I had the choice to remain a victim or to go public. I couldn't believe, as a Canadian citizen, that this man had more rights in my country than I had."

Kabongo also said she had demonstrated she was dishonest by looking at her husband's e-mail. Towell said he had disappeared and she was worried for him. Above all, she said, she was in love and "wanted to build a life with a decent man ... I just wanted my husband to come back home."

Immigration board counsel Chandala Krom-kayasone said Soumah had given vague and contradictory accounts of the child to his wife and to an immigration official and had attempted to dodge questions.

Soumah, in a final few minutes of testimony, was reminded by his lawyer that people said he had admitted fathering the baby in Africa.

"It's a lie," he said.

Immigration board member Rolland Ladou-cœur reserved his decision on Soumah's admission to Canada until next week.

