
Abdullah Almalki: A brief biography



Abdullah Almalki, a Canadian citizen, lives in Ottawa with his wife, Khuzaimah Kalifah, and five children aged three to eleven. He was born in Damascus, Syria in 1971, and immigrated to Canada in the summer of 1987, when he was sixteen years old, with his parents and three brothers. Abdullah became a Canadian citizen in 1991.

Abdullah finished high school in Ottawa, graduating from Lisgar Collegiate Institute in 1989. He

started in Carleton University's engineering program in the fall of 1989, and continued in the program for three years, working at the YM/YWCA on weekends, and in the summers, as a research assistant at the university.

Abdullah sponsored an Afghani orphan through Human Concern International (HCI) in the early 1990's and was anxious to learn more about the refugees in Pakistan. He took a break from school and travelled to Peshawar, Pakistan in the fall of 1992 for three months. From there he travelled to Islamabad and to refugee camps and "Hope Village," a village built by HCI for Afghani orphans. Seeing the human impact of the war in Afghanistan was a life-changing experience for Abdullah, and he committed to finding a way to apply his skills to improving these peoples' lives.

Abdullah returned to Canada in time for the winter, 1993 semester, and then went back to Pakistan the following summer for two months to work on a United Nations Development Program reconstruction project that was being awarded to HCI. The project was based in a village in the Paktia province of southern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border.

Abdullah returned to Canada in the late summer to marry Khuziamah, who he had met at Carleton University. The two married in October, 1993 and went to Pakistan in the fall of 1993 where Abdullah continued working on the reconstruction project. At the time, Ahmad Said Khadr was the Regional Director for HCI. Abdullah did not agree with how Khadr was managing the organization, and he and his wife returned home to Canada earlier than they had planned, in April 1994. Their first of five children was born that July.

Abdullah and his wife started an electronic components export business, combining his expertise in electronics with her expertise in business administration and economics. While in Pakistan, he had researched the market and wanted to become a supplier for Pakistan's largest privately owned military and government manufacturer and supplier, Micro Electronics International. Canada is a major player in telecommunications and

wireless communication subsystems and Abdullah felt that he would be able to provide quality components and systems, such as hand-held two-way radios, at a competitive price. The equipment his company exported was not strategic or in any way related to weapons, and did not require military export permits. Their company, Dawn Services, did well, and Abdullah soon branched out, developing a more diverse clientele. Abdullah travelled extensively for his work, to the United States, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Meanwhile Abdullah finished his degree, graduating as an electrical engineer from Carleton University in the summer of 1995. In the late nineties, Abdullah expanded his business beyond just exporting equipment to importing cell phone accessories.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Abdullah and his family found the climate in Canada difficult, and were also growing tired of ongoing surveillance by Canadian intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Khuzaimah's mother was ill and the family decided to travel to Malaysia in November, 2001, to stay with her family in Kuala Lumpur. They planned to return before their fifth child would be born the following February, but learning of complications with the pregnancy, they extended their stay until after Zakariya was born.

When Zakariya was one and a half months old and Khuzaimah was feeling strong, Abdullah returned his attention to his business, and travelled to see clients in Singapore and Saudi Arabia before going to Syria in May, 2003, where he was detained. Over the next twenty-two months, he was regularly subjected to intense torture, held in abysmal prison conditions and interrogated in ways that lead to the inescapable conclusion that information was being shared between his torturers and law enforcement and security agencies back in Canada.

Since being released and returning to Canada, Abdullah has been trying to make up for lost time with his family, and in particular, with his youngest child who was an infant when Abdullah was detained, and two and a half years old when Abdullah was released. His youngest daughter was just two years old when he was detained, and had barely started talking — when the family was reunited, she was four years old she was talking. This ordeal has been particularly hard on her.

Abdullah has been seeking professional medical and psychological help for ailments resulting from the torture he was subjected to in Syria. Abdullah's doctor has told him that his jaw is displaced, and he is also being treated for chronic pain in his shoulder, hip and foot. He has been diagnosed as having Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and severe depression.

Abdullah has agonized over the decision to speak publicly about what happened to him, worrying about the impact on his health and his family. He sees no other way, however, to ensure that the truth is exposed, that those responsible are held accountable, and that this does not happen to anyone else.