

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
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By Fax: 613-941-6900

September 18, 2003

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing with respect to the case of Maher Arar, the Canadian citizen of Syrian origin, who was arrested in the United States on September 26, 2002 and then deported to Syria where he has languished in detention without charge or trial for almost eleven months. We have welcomed the fact that you have taken a personal interest in this case and have taken steps to try to safeguard Mr. Arar's basic rights. In light of recent developments we are now urging you to do more.

We have learned through Haytham al'Maleh, the Syrian human rights lawyer who has been retained by Mr. Arar's wife to represent her husband, that Syrian authorities are likely to open a case against him before the country's Supreme State Security Court next week. I understand that Canadian officials have received similar information from Syrian authorities.

This adds yet another human rights obstacle to the mounting collection of abuses and violations that have marked this case. Amnesty International, other human rights groups and the U.S. Department of State all agree that this Court is simply incapable of delivering anything faintly resembling a fair trial. And already this is the case. Mr. Al'Maleh reports that he has been informed he will not be allowed access to Mr. Arar until after the proceedings actually commence. He is also currently being denied any access to Mr. Arar's file. He has no information what the charges will be, no idea what evidence will be presented and no opportunity to meet with his client. It is our understanding that Canadian officials have not yet been able to confirm that they will be allowed access to the trial to observe the proceedings. Finally, from Amnesty International's past experience of monitoring this Court, we know it is almost certain to fail to take seriously any of the allegations of torture that have come forward in this case.

Prime Minister, this case demands justice and this simply is not it. We urge that you now publicly and unequivocally make it clear to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that Mr. Arar must now be released and returned to Canada. If there is any credible evidence in the possession of Canadian law enforcement agencies that Mr. Arar is involved in terrorist or other unlawful activities, that should be dealt with through Canada's own justice system.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to seeing you take it up.

Sincerely,

Alex Neve
Secretary General