

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien  
Prime Minister of Canada  
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November 4, 2003

Dear Prime Minister,

Today, Maher Arar has spoken to Canadians about the year long ordeal that began for him when he was arrested while transiting through JFK Airport in New York City on September 26, 2002 and resulted in close to twelve months of grueling detention without charge or trial in Syria. In Syria he was subjected to severe torture and was held in abysmal prison conditions, best described by the term he used in his own mind, "*the grave.*"

Sadly, disturbing questions continue to mount about the role of law enforcement agencies and officials in all three countries involved in this wrenching drama: Canada, the United States and Syria. For more than one year Maher Arar's wife Monia Mazigh, concerned organizations, journalists, and politicians from all parties, have pressed for answers to those questions. But to date they remain unanswered.

How could a Canadian citizen have been barred from returning home to Canada? What role if any did the RCMP or CSIS play in the decision that led to his deportation from the United States to Syria? What attention was paid to the obvious concern that in Syria he would almost certainly be at risk of serious human rights violations? Did the RCMP or CSIS continue to play a role or receive information after his deportation? And now, recent disturbing leaks of information about Mr. Arar to the media from Canadian government sources add to the concerns. Have law enforcement agencies in Canada or the United States made use of information extracted from Mr. Arar under torture in Syria? Why has nothing been done to convey a strong public message that such leaks are unacceptable, possibly even criminal, and that those responsible will be disciplined and, if appropriate, prosecuted.

As those questions have mounted, it has become evident that the only effective way to provide a venue for Mr. Arar to obtain justice, as well as to examine what measures need to be put in place to guard against this happening again in the future, is through a public, independent inquiry. Other options are either restricted in their scope or limited in their

effectiveness. The day after Mr. Arar's return to Canada you stated that you felt there was no need for an inquiry. In light of Mr. Arar's public testimony today, I urge you to reconsider your position and convene an inquiry without further delay.

The questions in this case go to the heart of fundamental precepts such as the rule of law and respect for basic human rights. Those values have been challenged, directly and indirectly, by governments around the world who justify their actions by pointing to the new global imperative to fight "terrorism" and enhance security. But when universal human rights are undermined, injustice and insecurity are the inevitable results. Canada clearly stands for human rights and security, and against injustice and insecurity. Canada thus owes it to Mr. Arar, his family and to this country's entire citizenry to ensure that these questions do not go unanswered.

Finally Prime Minister, Mr. Arar has shared news publicly this morning that in the final two weeks he was in detention in Syria he encountered another Canadian citizen of Syrian origin: Abdullah Almalki. Mr. Arar knew Mr. Almalki casually in Canada as he is the brother of a close business associate and friend. He did not, however, recognize him at first when they crossed paths in prison, so severe has been the toll of torture and mistreatment that he has experienced. Mr. Almalki recounted to Mr. Arar the extent and nature of the torture he has been subjected to, which Mr. Arar describes as being far worse than what he himself experienced. Mr. Almalki has been in detention without charge or trial since May 2002 and it appears that he is still being beaten. Canadian consular officials have not been granted access to him.

Clearly there is need for a forceful intervention by the Canadian government with Syrian authorities to ensure that Mr. Almalki is protected from any further torture and that he is treated in accordance with international legal standards. Amnesty International urges that be done without delay, including at the very highest levels of exchange between the Canadian and Syrian governments. In Mr. Arar's case you personally sent an envoy to Syria, Minister Graham raised it in person and by phone with the Syrian Foreign Minister and Syria's Ambassador to Canada, and a two-person parliamentary delegation was sent to Syria to meet with Mr. Arar in prison. Given the alarming nature of the information that Mr. Arar has now provided about Mr. Almalki, such initiatives are most certainly needed again.

Sincerely,

Alex Neve  
Secretary General