

For immediate release

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## **Documents raise serious questions about Canada's request for and handling of Syrian interrogation files**

Ottawa — Documents released by the Arar Commission today raise serious questions about why Canadian officials asked Syrian officials for information that was likely the product of torture, and about how that information was handled.

The documents include reports written by former Ambassador to Syria, Franco Pillarella, about two meetings he held with Syrian officials soon after they admitted they were holding Maher Arar. The Syrian officials told Pillarella in the first meeting that they were still interrogating Mr. Arar, and promised to pass "any information they may gather on Arar's implication in terrorist activities." In a second meeting Pillarella asked for the file in time to personally take back to Canada, where it was given to CSIS and the RCMP. Another document describes the file as a "summary of Arar's confession."

"The Canadian government, especially its representatives in Syria, must have been fully aware that torture and ill treatment of prisoners is widespread in Syria, and should have been taking very seriously the very real probability that Mr. Arar was being tortured while he was being interrogated," said Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada.

"While the former Ambassador's primary concern should have been the vigorous safeguarding Mr. Arar's rights, instead, by asking for interrogation files, he may have encouraged further interrogation and increased the inherent risk of torture to Mr. Arar," said Neve.

"We also see evidence that the file from Mr. Arar's interrogators, which even a layperson would have known almost certainly bore the taint of torture, seems to have been passed on to other departments and agencies with complete disregard for its source or how it might be used," he said.

"We need to know why Mr. Pillarella asked for this file and how it was used," said Riad Saloojee, Executive Director of the Council on American Islamic Relations. "Was this file the source of the very serious and life-destroying allegations made against Mr. Arar in the media by unnamed Canadian officials?" he asked.

Mr. Saloojee also warned that many of the most important questions being asked of the Arar Commission deal with CSIS and the RCMP and are not touched on in the documents released today.

"We need to know more about any direct communication between Syrian and Canadian intelligence agencies, not just the exchanges facilitated by DFAIT, and we hope that this has been the focus of the *in-camera* hearings and will be a focus at the upcoming public hearings," said Mr. Saloojee.