

For immediate release

May 3, 2005

## **Was Maher Arar detained and interrogated in Syria as part of a Canadian-style rendition program?**

Ottawa — Organizations intervening at the Arar Inquiry are calling on Justice Dennis O'Connor to investigate whether Maher Arar was the victim of a Canadian program of extraordinary rendition. Speaking at a public hearing today, they asked the Commission to appoint a special rapporteur to bring evidence from other Canadian men who say they were interrogated and tortured in Syria.

"Unless the Commission examines the possibility that what happened to Maher Arar was part a broader systemic Canadian program of extraordinary rendition, it will, in our opinion, have failed in its mandate," said Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada.

The organizations point out that Mr. Arar, Mr. Ahmad Abou El Maati, Mr. Abdullah Almalki and Mr. Muayyed Nureddin were all people of interest to Canadian law enforcement and intelligence agencies before being detained, interrogated and allegedly tortured in Syria.

All of the four men say they were imprisoned at the Palestine Branch of the Syrian military intelligence prison and all say they were interrogated and tortured there. Mr. El Maati says he was forced to talk about Mr. Arar and Mr. Almalki. The RCMP then searched Mr. Almalki's home and visited Mr. Arar's home, and the two men later ended up being interrogated in the same prison.

Information used in the interrogation of Mr. Arar, Mr. El Maati and Mr. Nureddin seems to have come from Canada, and Mr. Almalki's family has asserted that he was detained in Syria at the request of Canadian authorities.

"As a former Solicitor General, it is clear to me that the commonalities and links between the four cases cannot possibly be dismissed or downplayed as mere coincidence," said Warren Allmand, who is serving as co-counsel for the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group at the Inquiry.

"The Muslim and Arab community in Canada are counting on the Commission to prioritize the issue of whether this is a systemic issue and whether Canada has its own rendition program," said Riad Saloojee, Executive Director of the Canadian Council on American Islamic Relations.

Mr. Almalki, Mr. El Maati and Mr. Nureddin all applied for standing at the Inquiry but were turned down. Government lawyers have argued that examining the other cases is irrelevant to the Commission's mandate.