

ARAR INQUIRY UPDATE

Maher Arar Support Committee, info@maherarar.ca
Produced by volunteer labour.

Take Action!

- Vote in the new poll on maherarar.ca and encourage others to vote.
- Write a letter to your local newspaper and comment on the government's actions or on how the inquiry is progressing.
- Write to Geoff Regan, the acting attorney general for the Arar inquiry, and ask for the government to be more open. You can contact him at: Regan.G@parl.gc.ca

Inquiry to hold hearing on RCMP documents

The Arar inquiry will hold a closed hearing on November 18 to decide if more RCMP documents should be released to the public.

Lorne Waldman, counsel for Maher Arar, says the government is objecting to the disclosure. However, the government may later have to argue its case in a public hearing if the commissioner of the inquiry, Justice Dennis O'Connor, decides that will also be necessary after the closed hearing in order for him to make a final ruling on the matter.

The last RCMP report released by the inquiry revealed that several errors were committed in the RCMP's investigation of Arar, including the failure to obtain warrants and the sharing of information with foreign agencies without applying appropriate conditions on its use. The Garvie report also revealed that at least one RCMP officer knew Arar might be deported to Syria while he was still in U.S. custody.

The inquiry's hearings have been closed to the public for the past two months because it is

examining evidence that the government has declared confidential for the protection of national security. O'Connor is expected to give a ruling at the end of the secret hearings to make some of the information public, however, the government still has the power to prevent the information from being disclosed despite O'Connor's ruling.

The secret hearings are expected to end in December, with the public hearings resuming in the new year.

Inquiry wants public input on RCMP watchdog

The Arar inquiry is now accepting submissions from the public on an "independent, arm's length review mechanism" that will watch over the RCMP's national security investigations.

The commissioner of the inquiry, Justice Dennis O'Connor, must decide whether the RCMP's current review mechanism, the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, is a sufficient check on the RCMP's national security work or should be granted more powers. He can also

recommend an entirely new review mechanism.

The recommendation of a watchdog for the RCMP is one of the major components of the inquiry's mandate, along with the investigation into the role of Canadian officials in the deportation and imprisonment of Maher Arar.

Yet while O'Connor has decided to hold the two components of his mandate simultaneously, some say the policy review concerning the RCMP should only begin after O'Connor concludes the investigation into the

Arar case.

"Until we have some idea of how well or how badly the RCMP dealt with Mr. Arar, it is premature to talk about an oversight mechanism," says Paul Copeland, counsel for the Law Union of Ontario. The law union has partial standing in the inquiry.

O'Connor will hold a series of public meetings on the issue next year, but says he will reopen the meetings if relevant information is later revealed through the investigation of Arar's case.

UPDATE on Abdullah Almalki

According to the Ottawa Citizen, the RCMP is attempting to gather evidence against Abdullah Almalki by interrogating "persons of interest" in other countries and by obtaining foreign documents.

Almalki may eventually be called as a witness in the Arar inquiry.

His story received widespread attention when Maher Arar spoke of Almalki in his first public statement after returning from his ordeal in Syria. Arar said he had seen Almalki in a Syrian prison, and that Almalki said he had been tortured.

Almalki returned to Canada in August, despite speculation he would have to serve in Syria's military, a mandatory obligation on all Syrian males, after he was also released from prison. The media reported him as thanking the Syrian government for allowing him to return to Canada. However, he did not thank the Canadian government.

No charges have ever been laid against Almalki by Canadian authorities, although the RCMP has searched his property.

Arar may have been in secret CIA prison

An Israeli newspaper has reported the U.S. may be imprisoning Al-Qaeda suspects in a secret CIA prison in Jordan, and Maher Arar is now wondering if he was held there shortly before he was sent to Syria.

The Haaretz newspaper wrote that such a facility outside the U.S. "enables CIA interrogators to apply interrogation methods banned by U.S. law." However, an anonymous Jordanian official told the newspaper the allegation is untrue.

Nonetheless, Arar now wonders if this was the location he was first held in when U.S. officials deported him to the Middle East.

On Oct. 8, 2002, U.S. authorities deported Arar to Jordan on a private jet. Once there, Arar says six or seven Jordanian officials blindfolded him and drove him to an unknown facility, beating him every time he tried to move or talk. Arar says he spent several hours in the facility, where he was questioned, photographed and fingerprinted. He also

recalls being in an elevator, which he says is unusual for Middle Eastern prisons.

What's more, a briefing note to Canada's foreign affairs minister, obtained under the Access to Information Act by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin, seems to indicate that Arar was still in U.S. custody at that time. The note says both U.S. and Jordanian officials delivered Arar to Syria.

Arar spent the next year in a Syrian prison before he was returned to Canada.

Family goes public for last Canadian imprisoned in Syria

Another Canadian is facing deportation to Syria

The family of Arwad Al-Boushi, the last Canadian imprisoned in Syria, is now publicly appealing for the Canadian government's help in securing his release.

"We don't know what's going on in Syria," said Al-Boushi's wife, Jomana, to the Toronto Star. "(Canada is) doing the best they can but I guess it's not enough. My husband's still there."

Amnesty International Canada and Maher Arar have also called on the Canadian government to intervene more forcefully.

Syria had previously allowed consular access to Al-Boushi, but stopped all visits by Canadian officials in July and is now

ignoring diplomatic notes from the Canadian government.

Al-Boushi was first jailed in July 2002, accused of being part of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that opposes the Syrian government.

Alex Neve, Amnesty's secretary general in Canada, says Al-Boushi is likely being tortured. He was tried in a military court, but the charges against him and his sentence remain unclear. Amnesty has requested the Canadian government seek Al-Boushi's release or secure a fair trial.

Alexa McDonough, an MP and former leader of the New Democratic Party, has also spoken out for Al-Boushi.

"This government has a notion that quiet diplomacy is always the way to go," McDonough told the Ottawa Citizen. "Canada's got to start speaking far more clearly, strongly and firmly about the complete and total unacceptability of what's going on with these cases."

Another Syrian-born Canadian, Ammar Khatib, is also facing deportation to Syria this month despite his fears of torture. His father was part of the Muslim Brotherhood.

"The problem is ... once I go there, that's it. I will not see the sun again," Khatib told the CBC.