

Toronto Star

THE ARAR DEAL: \$10.5M redress for deportation and torture

'I wish I could buy my life back'



Maher Arar leaves a news conference in Ottawa yesterday in which he lamented a lost career and lost peace of mind.

Captors tortured Arar's mind with threats of worse to come

RICHARD BRENNAN
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Every time Maher Arar was severely beaten in a Syrian prison he was warned the next day would be worse. And often it was.

The psychological torture helped prolong the pain endured by the occupant of basement Cell 2, pain dealt from the end of a thick electrical cord and a clenched fist.

The first week at the detention centre run by Syrian military intelligence was the worst, Arar recalled, with daily beatings and whippings. They came in October 2002, after the Americans deported him to Jordan, alleging suspicions of terrorism. He was then moved to Syria.

The torture was designed to extract a false confession that he was an Afghanistan-trained terrorist.

Day three, Oct. 11, 2002, was the most terrible for Arar. Interrogation lasted between 16 and 18 hours, and he was subjected to great physical and psychological pain. Sometimes he was put in a waiting room so he could hear other prisoners screaming. At that point, Arar was ready to admit to anything. "They used the cable on the second and third day, and after that mostly beat me with their hands, hitting me in the stomach and on the back of my neck,

and slapping me on the face. Where they hit me with the cables, my skin turned blue for two or three weeks, but there was no bleeding," Arar said in a Nov. 4, 2003 statement.

During that long, torturous October day he twice urinated in his pants, then had to wear the same clothes for the next 2½ months. Even after the beatings subsided, the psychological terror continued. At the end of each session his interrogators warned "tomorrow will be tough," or "tomorrow will be worse for you."

During the Arar inquiry, Stephen Toope, the former dean of law at McGill University who investigated Arar's treatment in Syria, said conditions of his detention were "atrocious."

Arar called his two-by-one-metre cell at the Far Falestin detention centre a "grave" and a "slow death." He was held there for 10 months and 10 days, sharing the space with cats and rats. The cell held two blankets and two bottles, one for water and the other for urine.

On Aug. 20, 2003, after he'd all but given up hope, Arar was transferred to Sednaya Prison, which he described as "like heaven" by comparison. He was released on Oct. 5, 2003, after finally signing a "confession."

CHRIS WATTIE/REUTERS

The journey: Detention to compensation

■ **Sept. 26, 2002:** On a stopover at JFK airport in New York, Maher Arar is detained as a terrorism suspect en route home to Ottawa from a holiday in Tunisia. Consular officials and an American lawyer visit him.

■ **Oct. 8, 2002:** Arar is flown in a private plane to Jordan, then driven across the border to his native Syria where he is tortured, questioned and

held for a year without charges in a notorious prison in Damascus.

■ **Oct. 6, 2003:** Arar reunites with his wife and two children in Montreal after Syria frees him.

■ **Nov. 4, 2003:** Arar reports he was mentally and physically tortured during his Syrian incarceration and forced to sign confessions.

■ **Jan. 28, 2004:** Public Safety Minister Anne McLellan calls an inquiry into the actions of Canadian officials with respect to Arar. Justice Dennis O'Connor is to lead the inquiry.

■ **Sept. 18, 2006:** After lengthy hearings, O'Connor releases his findings, restoring Arar's reputation, but revealing the RCMP gave the U.S. false data tying Arar to Al Qaeda, then misled

the government of Canada about their role in the case.

■ **Sept. 19, 2006:** Opposition parties call on RCMP Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli to resign. Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day rejects the idea. (Zaccardelli's resignation is accepted Dec. 20.)

■ **Sept. 20, 2006:** House of Commons

votes unanimously that "an apology should be presented" to Arar for Ottawa's role in his wrongful deportation by the U.S. to a Syrian torture cell.

■ **Jan. 26, 2007:** Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologizes to Arar and announces an \$10.5 million compensation package.

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