[FBIS Transcribed Text]

An Ottawa engineer detained by U.S. authorities and accused of having links to al-Qaeda was terrified that he would be deported to his native Syria, a U.S. lawyer says.

Ottawa is demanding that Washington divulge the whereabouts of Maher Arar, a 32-year-old Canadian citizen arrested during a stopover at New York's Kennedy airport on Sept. 26 as he was travelling to Montreal from Tunisia.

Amal Oummin, an Arabic-speaking immigration lawyer based in New York, said yesterday she may have been the last contact the family had with Mr. Arar before he disappeared.

Ms. Oummin spoke to Mr. Arar, who was being held at Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center, on Oct. 5 at the request of his family.

"Basically, everything happened so fast that before we could take the next step we couldn't find him and then we heard he was deported."

Ms. Oummin said Mr. Arar, a telecommunications engineer, told her that U.S. authorities had asked him to sign a document permitting his deportation to Syria but that he had refused. "He was very, very concerned and worried that he was going to be deported to Syria."

She reassured him that her understanding of U.S. law was that if he was going to be deported he could choose to go to Canada. She also told him that if he feared being deported to Syria he would get a chance to argue his case.

But Ms. Oummin said that opportunity never arose, and Mr. Arar was later interrogated by U.S. officials with no lawyer present. She said she and another New York lawyer involved in the case had no real chance to be present because they were notified by voice-mail message on a Sunday that
the interview was being held that evening.

She said a U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service document she examined indicated that Mr. Arar[0] was being detained "for allegedly being a member of a terrorist organization, to wit al-Qa'ida."

Mr. Arar[0] "was in very, very bad shape, from my observations," Ms. Oummih said.

"He was very emotional, very scared. He was not doing well at all. I was very concerned about him. . . . He didn't seem to know what was going on. He was very disoriented. He seemed very confused. He was very, very emotional. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that about half the time I just had to let him sob and cry."

Riad Saloojee of the Council on American-Islamic Relations Canada has said Mr. Arar's[0] treatment is a breach of Canadian sovereignty.

Mr. Saloojee said Mr. Arar[0], father of two young Canadian-born children, could face severe punishment in Syria because he avoided compulsory military service before leaving the country for Canada as a teenager.

Both Mr. Arar[0] and his wife, Monia, got their postsecondary education in Canada.

Reynald Doiron, a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs, said an INS official provided incomplete information when he contacted the Canadian government about the case on Saturday.

Mr. Doiron said as far as Ottawa knows Mr. Arar[0] was not charged with any offence.

"We need to find out, since he was transiting in the U.S. on a Canadian passport, why it is he was removed to an undisclosed country from the United States."

[Description of Source: Toronto The Globe and Mail (Internet Version-WWW) in English -- centrist daily; leading national newspaper of record]

THIS REPORT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

------------------------------------------------------------------
Unclassified

[Go To Last Hit][Go To Top of Document]