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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

CAIR-CANADA: FOUR MEN HAUNTED BY TORTURE

Ottawa's Abdullah Almalki often shrinks from the distress of his children, terrified by the memories their crying unmoors.

Mr. Almalki, 35, a Carleton University graduate and a father of six, endured 22 months in Syrian jails where, he says, he was repeatedly tortured and interrogated, based on information that could only have originated with Canadian security officials.

Among the worst parts of his experience, he says, were the cries of other men being tortured and the wailing of women and children held in nearby cells.

I used to hear constantly the screams of other people being tortured. I can't forget the kids I saw in that place, he told a news conference on Parliament Hill yesterday.

Mr. Almalki is one of four Arab-Canadian men who suspect that Canadian security officials were complicit in their arrest and torture overseas.

The best known member of that group is former Ottawa computer engineer Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian deported from the U.S. to Syria in October 2002.

Mr. Arar's experience is the subject of a federal commission of inquiry, headed by Justice Dennis O'Connor, which is expected to report next week.

Mr. Almalki hopes that report will recommend an independent public review of his case and those of Ahmad El-Maati and Muayyed Nureddin.

The men have also filed a civil suit against the Canadian government that they intend to pursue if federal officials refuse to examine the larger pattern of foreign arrests, detentions and torture.

When I was in Syria, I used to ask the Syrians, Why was I being held? Why was I tortured so badly? Why was I treated so terribly? The answer, Mr. Almalki said, used to be, Because of Canada.

For over four-and-a-half years, I have wanted answers. I have wanted to know why and how the Canadian government was involved in my imprisonment in Syria.

Mr. Almalki was not alone in demanding answers yesterday.

He was joined at yesterday's news conference by Mr. El-Maati, 41, a Toronto truck driver and former mujahed; Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty International Canada; Faisal Kutty, vice-chair of the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations; Shirley Heafey, former chairwoman of the RCMP Public Complaints Commission; and former solicitor general Warren Allmand.

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453 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Tel: (202) 488-8787

Fax: (202) 488-0833

www.cair.com

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