
Canada is complicit in the torture of Canadians

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It cannot be denied: Canada remains complicit in the illegal detention and torture of its own citizens. The inquiry into the Maher Arar affair proved this Canadian was tortured in Syria on the basis of false accusations by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service.

Unfortunately, the kind of injustice suffered by Arar continues, as proven by the cases of three Canadian victims of "extraordinary rendition," the practice of transferring suspected terrorists to countries that employ torture. These three men were seized individually while travelling abroad and were tortured in Syria on the basis of allegations originating in Canada.

While in Syria for his wedding in 2001, Ahmad El Maati was jailed, and, under torture, signed a false confession later used in arrest warrants in Canada. He had worked as a truck driver in Toronto, and a map found in one of the trucks appeared in the hands of a torturer. A headline in the Globe and Mail read: "It was hyped as a terrorist map. It was cited by Egyptian torturers. It is a Visitor's Guide to Ottawa." El Maati was returned to Canada without being charged with a crime and suffering psychological and physical damages.

Muayyed Nureddin, the second Canadian tortured in Syria, was detained in 2003 when he returned from a visit to Iraq. Torturers asked questions that he had been asked by officials in Canada and forced him to sign undisclosed documents. He was released without being charged.

The third Canadian tortured in Syria with Canada's complicity is Abdullah Almalki, an Ottawa engineer alleged to be a security threat and frequently interrogated by the RCMP and CSIS. He has never been charged, nor has he been provided with any evidence against him. Imprisoned during a family visit to Syria in 2003, he endured two years of torture in which he was tormented by questions provided by the RCMP and CSIS that were delivered by Canadian representatives in Syria.

An investigation into the role of Canadian authorities in the kidnap and torture of these three Canadians has begun. However, the men and their lawyers are being denied participation and access to evidence against them. Secret trials violate our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and suggest that our government is denying complicity in the kidnap and torture of our citizens.

The case of Abousfian Abdelrazik provides recent evidence that Canada participates in illegal detention. The Sudanese, who detained him, said he was arrested at the request of Canadian officials, which was confirmed by a Globe and Mail story. Jailed for a year, Abdelrazik reported that he was interrogated by CSIS agents. Canadian intelligence agencies have now labelled him as an al-Qaida supporter but have refused to provide evidence to him or his lawyer. Denied a new passport and placed on a no-fly list, he is unable to return to Canada.

Last week, Abdelrazik sought refuge in the Canadian embassy in Sudan, insisting on his innocence and begging to be flown home to answer the allegations against him. He was told that he could stay only for a few days and that Canada can do nothing about the appearance of his name on a no-fly list. However, government documents prove that Canadian authorities directed Air Canada to not carry Abdelrazik. This Canadian citizen has not been charged with any crime and must be brought back to his home in Canada to face the allegations against him in a fair trial.

How did we come to tolerate our government's obsession with security? Why have these appalling acts of injustice not been challenged under our Charter of Rights? What is happening to Canada? And do Canadians care?

An opportunity for Kingstonians to learn more about human rights abuses in the name of national security takes place today at 7 p.m. in the Wilson Room of Kingston Public Library. The three men who were imprisoned and tortured in Syria will speak.

We must learn more about the injustices our government inflicted on these Canadians in order to end such shameful practices, which do not reflect the values of our nation.

Judi Wyatt

Kingston