

CSIS interviewed Canadian imprisoned in Egypt without telling Foreign Affairs: report

BY ANDREW DUFFY, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN FEBRUARY 23, 2010

OTTAWA — Agents from Canada's spy service travelled to Egypt to interview an imprisoned Arab-Canadian in December 2002 without informing Foreign Affairs officials of their visit, according to new information released by a federal inquiry.

Once in Egypt, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) agents failed to ask Ahmad El-Maati, a Toronto truck driver, if he had been tortured while in custody.

Frank Iacobucci is conducting the Internal Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad Abou-Elmaati and Muayyed Nureddin.

On Tuesday he announced previously undisclosed information relating to the inquiry's public report.

"Several witnesses, from both CSIS and the RCMP, told the Inquiry that it was not the responsibility of intelligence or law enforcement officials to be concerned about the human rights of a Canadian detainee, which were for DFAIT (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade) alone to consider," Iacobucci writes in a supplementary report released Tuesday.

"This approach is not, in my opinion, satisfactory."

Iacobucci found that CSIS' actions likely contributed to El-Maati's mistreatment in Egypt.

In a public report issued in October 2008, Iacobucci concluded that El-Maati was tortured while detained in Syria and Egypt.

That initial report said Canadian officials bear some responsibility for the torture suffered by El-Maati and two other Canadian citizens imprisoned overseas in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks.

The federal government had initially objected on national security grounds to the information in the supplementary report being made public.

Iacobucci said Tuesday that no Canadian officials should consider themselves exempt from ensuring "the greatest possible respect for human rights" when dealing with cases of Canadians imprisoned overseas.

The judge also criticized CSIS officials for failing to ask El-Maati how he had been treated, even though that fact would have been pertinent in assessing whatever information he provided. A CSIS witness told Iacobucci that the agents did not ask about his treatment because they knew Canadian diplomats were already involved in the case.

"While I am satisfied by this explanation," Iacobucci wrote, "I find the apparent compartmentalization of human rights concerns within agencies of the Canadian government to be troubling."

El-Maati was the first of four Canadian citizens to be detained in Syria after 9/11.

He had travelled to Damascus to prepare for his wedding to a Syrian woman, Rola. In Syria, he was

