

# The Story of Maher Arar: Unfolding US-Canada Police State

By [Global Research](#)

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## Mahers Story

You can read the chronology of events that led to Maher's arrest, deportation and return in pdf format [here](#).

You can read Maher's statement during the press conference held on November 4, 2003 in pdf format [here](#)

## Maher Arar: Chronology of events

September 26, 2002 to October 5, 2003

The following is a chronology of events as told by Maher Arar, beginning with his arrival at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York on September 26, 2002, and ending with his October 5, 2003 release from Syrian prison.

### September 26, 2002

Arar boards an American Airlines flight from Zurich to JFK airport in New York, en route to Montreal. He arrives in New York at 2:00 p.m., and lines up at the immigration counter. **When his name is entered into the computer he is pulled aside.** Two hours later he is fingerprinted and photographed. He is told this is regular procedure. Airport police search his bag and wallet and photocopy his passport. **They refuse to answer Arar's questions, and will not let him make a phone call.**

Officials from the New York Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigations say they will question him and then let him catch his connecting flight to Montreal. **Arar asks for a lawyer, and is told he has no right to a lawyer because he is not an American citizen.** An intense interrogation continues until midnight. Arar is questioned about his work, his salary, his travel in the US, and about different people.

**He is questioned in particular about Abdullah Almalki.** Arar tells them that he only knows him very casually, but that he worked with his brother Nazih at two high tech firms in Ottawa and Hull. He tells them that the Almalki family came from Syria about the same time as his, so the families know of each other. Arar does not know why they are questioning him so much about Abdullah. He tells them he has seen Abdullah a few times and he describes, in detail, the times he can remember. **Arar is shocked when they show him the rental lease he signed when he moved to Ottawa in 1997.** It was witnessed by Abdullah Almalki. Arar remembers this and explains he had asked Nazih to sign it, but that Nazih was

busy and sent his brother instead.

Arar describes the questioning as intense, and says he was pressured to answer all questions quickly. He says they were humiliating and rude. **He tells them he has nothing to hide, and tells them everything he knows. He asks repeatedly for a lawyer, but the request is ignored.** Arar's **wrists and ankles are chained** and he is taken in a van to a nearby building where others are being held and put in a cell.

### **September 27, 2002**

At 9:00 a.m. Maher is taken for more questioning. He has not eaten or slept since he was on the flight from Zurich.

He is **interrogated for eight hours** and is asked many questions including what he thinks about Bin Laden, Palestine and Iraq. He is also asked about the mosques he prays in, his bank accounts, his email addresses and his relatives.

**An INS official informs him they would like him to voluntarily return to Syria. Arar says no, he would like to return to Canada. He asks again for a lawyer, and is refused.**

Arar is asked to sign an immigration form, but they do not show him the contents. Arar, exhausted, signs the form.

At about 8:00 p.m. he is shackled and put in a van and driven to the **Metropolitan Detention Centre**. Arar continues to ask why this is happening, and they continue to refuse to answer him or tell him where he is being taken. He is strip searched, and asked to sign more forms for a doctor, and vaccinated. **He asks what the vaccine is, but they will not tell him.**

**Arar continues to ask for a lawyer and a phone call, and is ignored.**

### **September 28 to October 7, 2002**

Arar is not able to sleep until early in the morning, and wakes up at 11:00 a.m. on September 28. This is the first time he has slept since leaving Zurich two days earlier.

Arar notices he is being treated differently than other prisoners at the MDC – for example, guards will not give him toothpaste or a toothbrush or newspapers.

On the second or third day at the MDC, Arar is given a document saying that he is inadmissible to the United States under Section 235C of the Immigration and Nationality Act, because he is not a citizen of the United States; he is a native of Syria and is a citizen of Syria and Canada; he arrived in the United States on September 26, 2002 and applied for admission as a non-immigrant in transit through the United States, destined to Canada; and he is a member of an organization that has been designated by the Secretary of State as a Foreign Terrorist organization, to with **Al Qaeda** aka Al Qa'ida.

Arar **continues to ask for a lawyer and phone call, and his requests are denied** until October 2 when he is permitted to make a two minute telephone call to his mother-in-law in Ottawa. He tells her he is frightened and he might be deported to Syria, and asks her to get him a lawyer.

On October 3 or 4, Arar is asked to fill out a form asking where he would like to be deported to. He writes that **he chooses to be sent to Canada**, and that he has no concerns about going there. He signs the document.

On October 4 Arar receives a visit from Canadian consul Maureen Girvan. Arar shows her the document he has been given, and she notes the contents. He tells her he is frightened of being deported to Syria, and she reassures him that this will not happen.

On October 5 Arar is visited by lawyer Amal Oummih. They talk for 30 minutes, and he relates his fears to her, and asks her to help. She advises him not to sign anything without her being present.

## **October 6, 2002**

**At 9:00 p.m. on Sunday night, guards come to take Arar from his cell, saying that his attorney is there to see him.** Arar is taken to a room where about seven officials are waiting. His attorney is not there. He is told that they contacted his attorney and that “he” refused to come (this is strange because Arar’s lawyer is a woman).

They ask why Arar does not want to go to Syria, and **Arar tells them he is afraid he will be tortured there.** He says he did not do his military service before leaving Syria, he is a Sunni Muslim, and his mother’s cousin was accused of being part of the Muslim Brotherhood and imprisoned. **They ask him to sign a document, and he refuses.**

This session continues until 3:00 a.m., when he is taken back to his cell.

## **October 8, 2002**

Arar is **woken at 3:00 a.m. and is told he is leaving.** He is given food, and then taken from his cell. A woman reads to him from a document, saying that based on classified information that they could not reveal to him, and because he knows a number of men, including – Abdullah Almalki, Nazih Almalki, and Ahmad Abou-el-Maati, the INS Director has decided to deport him to Syria.

**Arar protests, saying he will be tortured there. He is ignored.** He is chained and taken to a waiting car, and driven to an airport in New Jersey.

**Arar is placed on a private jet. He is the only passenger.** They fly to Washington, and the people with him disembark, and a new team gets on the plane.

Arar overhears the men talking on the phone saying that **Syria is refusing to take him directly, but Jordan will take him.**

They fly to Portland, to Rome, and then to Amman, Jordan.

On the trip to Amman Arar is given a sweater and jeans to wear. He does not know then that he will wear these clothes until the end of December.

## **October 9, 2002**

The jet lands in Amman, Jordan at 3:00 a.m. There are six or seven Jordanians waiting for him. **Arar is blindfolded and chained and put into a van. He is forced to bend his**

**head down in the back seat. He is beaten intensely every time he tries to move or talk.**

Thirty minutes later they arrive at a building where they remove his blindfold and ask him routine questions, before taking him to a cell.

In the afternoon they take his fingerprints and photographs and he is **blindfolded and put in another van.** He is **told he is going back to Montreal.**

About forty-five minutes later, they stop and he is put in a different car. He is forced to keep his head down, and **he is beaten again.**

Over an hour later they **arrive at what Arar believes was the Syrian border. He is handed over to a new team of men,** and put in a new car which travels for another three hours to Damascus.

At about 6:00 p.m. he is taken into a building which he later finds out is the **“Far Falestin”** or the Palestine Branch of the Syrian military intelligence.

He is taken into a room for interrogation. There are three men in the room. Arar later learns that one of the men is a colonel.

They put him on a chair, and the colonel begins the interrogation.

Arar is asked about his family and why they left Syria. Arar answers the questions but is **threatened with a metal chair in the corner.** He later learns that this chair is used to torture people.

Arar decides he will confess to anything they want in order to stop the torture.

The interrogation lasts for four hours without any violence – only the threat of violence is used.

## **October 10, 2002**

Early in the morning on October 10 Arar is taken downstairs to a basement. The guard opens the door and **Arar sees for the first time the cell he will live in for the following ten months and ten days.**

Arar calls the cell a “grave.” It is **three feet wide, six feet deep and seven feet high.** It has a metal door, with a small opening which does not let in light because of a piece of metal on the outside for sliding things into the cell. There is a one by two foot opening in the ceiling with iron bars. This opening is below another ceiling and lets in just a tiny shaft of light. **Cats urinate through the ceiling traps of these cells, often onto the prisoners.** Rats wander there too.

There is **no light source in the cell.** The only things in the cell are two blankets, two plastic bowls and two bottles. Arar later uses two small empty boxes – one as a toilet when he is not allowed to the washroom, and one for prayer water.

## October 11 to 16, 2002

Early the next morning Arar is taken upstairs for intense interrogation. He is **beaten on his palms, wrists, lower back and hips with a shredded black electrical cable which is about two inches in diameter. He is threatened with the metal chair, electric shocks, and with the tire, into which prisoners are stuffed, immobilized and beaten.**

The next day Arar is **interrogated and beaten on and off for eighteen hours.** Arar begs them to stop. He is **asked if he received military training in Afghanistan, and he falsely confesses and says yes. This is the first time Arar is ever questioned about Afghanistan.** They ask at which camp, and provide him with a list, and he picks one of the camps listed.

Arar urinated on himself twice during the interrogation.

Throughout this period of intense interrogation Arar was not taken back to his cell, but to a **waiting room where he could hear other prisoners being tortured and screaming.** One time, he heard them repeatedly slam a man's head on a desk really hard.

## October 17 to 22, 2002

During the second week of the interrogation, Arar is forced into a car tire so he is immobilized. This was used to scare him, but he is not beaten while in the tire, as with other prisoners.

The **intensity of the beating and interrogation subsides after October 17.** Interrogators start using a new tactic, taking Arar into a room blindfolded so he can hear people talking about him, saying, "He knows lots of people who are terrorists," "We will get their numbers," "He is a liar," "He has been out of the country." They occasionally slap him on the face.

## October 23, 2002

Arar is taken from his cell and his beard is shaved. He is taken to another building where his interrogators and other investigators are waiting for him. They seem nervous. Arar is warned not to say he has been beaten, and is then taken into a room where he **meets with a Canadian consul. He is accompanied by his interrogator, a colonel and two other Syrian officials at all times.** The meeting lasts for ten minutes and Arar cries throughout.

## October 29, 2002

Arar receives his **second visit from Canadian consul.** He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator throughout the meeting.

## Early November, 2002

In early November 2002, Arar is taken up from his cell to **sign and place his thumbprint on every page of a hand-written document** about seven pages long. He is not allowed to read it.

He is shown another document about three pages long, with questions: Who are your

friends? How long have you been out of the country? The last question is followed by empty lines. The first questions were already answered by his captors, but Arar is made to answer the last in his own handwriting as they dictate to him. He is told to write that he has been to Afghanistan. He is **forced to sign and place his thumb print** on the last page of that document.

### **November 12, 2002**

Arar receives his **third visit from Canadian consul**. He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator throughout the meeting. Arar asks for money so he can purchase clothing and supplies. After the meeting, his captors are angry that he made that request, but he is not beaten.

### **December 10, 2002**

Arar receives his **fourth visit from Canadian consul**. He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator throughout the meeting. The consul delivers money and two weeks after the meeting, Arar is able to get new clothes and change for the first time since the flight from the US.

### **December, 2002**

Some time in December Arar experiences a **nervous crisis**. His mind is crowded with memories, and he loses control and starts screaming. This happens three times. The second time a guard notices and takes him to wash his face.

### **January 7, 2003**

Arar receives his **fifth visit from Canadian consul**. He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator throughout the meeting.

### **February 8, 2003**

Arar receives his **sixth visit** from Canadian consul. He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator throughout the meeting. During the visit the **Syrian officials question why these visits are necessary**, saying they will take care of Arar.

### **Early April, 2003**

Arar is taken from his cell and placed in an outdoor court. This is the **first time he has seen sunlight in six months**.

### **April 23, 2003**

Arar is taken from his cell and his beard is shaved. He is told to comb his hair and wash his face well. He is taken outside, put in a car, and driven to another building. He is taken into the building and given tea. The Syrian officials seem very agitated and nervous. Arar is taken into a room to meet with the **Canadian Ambassador to Syria and MPs Marlene Catterall and Sarkis Assadourian**. He is accompanied by his interrogator and other Syrian officials throughout the meeting. After he is taken from the room he **overhears officials talking about media coverage of his case**.

## June, 2003

Arar is taken outside into the **sunshine twice in June.**

He asks to meet with an investigator and his request is eventually granted. He **asks to be moved to a cell fit for human beings.** The Syrian official responds they are very busy because of the situation in Iraq and orders him back to his cell.

## July, 2003

Arar asks again for a meeting with an investigator and his request is eventually granted. He tells him he has nothing to do with Al Qaeda. The **Syrian official asks Arar why he is accused of this, why they sent a delegation, and why these people hate him so much.** Arar says he does not know.

**Arar notices his skin is turning yellow, and feels he is at the brink of a nervous breakdown.**

## July, 2003

Arar is taken from his cell and **questioned about William Sampson.** He does not know who this is, and says he does not. After the questioning **Arar wonders if this is a journalist.**

## August 14, 2003

Arar receives his **seventh visit from the Canadian consul.** He is again accompanied by Syrian officials and his interrogator, and the head Syrian military intelligence is also there. **Arar has decided he cannot survive living in these conditions anymore, and that it is worth risking more physical torture to stop the ongoing psychological torture of remaining in the "grave."** He bursts and tells the Canadian consul, in English, in front of the Syrian officials, about his cell and the conditions he is living in. The consul asks if he has been tortured, and Arar replies yes, of course – at the beginning. After the meeting, Arar can see that his captors are very angry, and he is terrified that he will be physically tortured again, but he is not.

## August 19, 2003

Arar is taken upstairs and made to sit on the floor. He is given a piece of paper to write on. He is **told to write, among other things, that he went to a training camp in Afghanistan.** The official kicks him every time he objects. He also threatens to put Arar in the tire. Arar is **forced to sign and put his thumb print on the last page.**

Arar is then taken to the Investigation Branch and placed in a collective cell, which is about six by four metres in size. There are about forty-six people crammed into the space – **the door is difficult to open because of the crowding.** The prisoners ask him who he is and where he has been and they are shocked to learn he has been in the "grave" for so long. Arar spends that night there.

## August 20, 2003

Arar is blindfolded, put in a vehicle and driven to **Sednaya prison.** Once again Syrian



officials will not tell him where he is going. He has heard from the other prisoners at the Investigation Branch that prisoners are tortured when they arrive there, so he tells officials there he had been recently visited by a Canadian consular official. This seems to have an impact – Arar is not tortured when he arrives at Sednaya prison.

He is placed in a collective cell and is able to talk with other prisoners and move around. Arar says **this was like heaven compared to where he was at the Palestine Branch.**

### **September 19 or 20, 2003**

Arar is teaching English to some other prisoners in his cell when he hears others saying that another Canadian has arrived. He looks up and sees a thin man with a shaved head looking very weak. After some time he realizes this is **Abdullah Almalki.**

Almalki tells Arar he has also been at the Palestine Branch, and that he was in a cell like Arar's for even longer. He tells Arar he has been **severely tortured - with the tire and the cable. He says he was also hung upside down.** Almalki also says he was tortured at Sednaya prison just weeks before.

### **September 28 to October 4, 2003**

Arar is called from his cell and told to collect his things. He is blindfolded, put in a van, and **driven back to the Palestine Branch.** He is put in one of the interrogation waiting rooms and **kept there for seven days. The entire time he is there he hears prisoners being tortured and screaming.** Arar is devastated and does not know what is happening to him.

At 9:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 4 he is **told that he will be going to Canada.** Arar does not believe this.

### **October 5, 2003**

On Sunday morning Arar is told by the colonel to wash his face. The colonel seems very unhappy. They put chains on his wrists and legs, and put him in a car. He is driven to a court. Arar still does not believe he is going to Canada. He is taken to meet with a prosecutor and asks again for a lawyer. He is told he will not need one.

The prosecutor reads from Arar's confession and **Arar tries to protest, saying he was beaten and forced to say he went to Afghanistan.** The prosecutor ignores him and tells him he must **sign and put his finger print on the document.** Arar does as he is told. Arar is not permitted to see the document. The prosecutor does not lay out any charges and tells him that he will be released.

Arar is taken outside and put in a car and driven back to the Palestine Branch where he meets with the head of the Syrian Military Intelligence and officials from the Canadian embassy. Arar believes, at last, that he is being released. The colonel escorts them out of the building into a waiting embassy car. Arar is driven to the Canadian embassy, and later taken to the Canadian Consul's home for a shower before taking his flight out of Syria.

Maher's statement to the media on November 4, 2003.

I am here today to tell the people of Canada what has happened to me.



There have been many allegations made about me in the media, all of them by people who refuse to be named or come forward. So before I tell you who I am and what happened to me, I will tell you who I am not.

I am not a terrorist. I am not a member of Al Qaeda and I do not know any one who belongs to this group. All I know about Al Qaeda is what I have seen in the media. I have never been to Afghanistan. I have never been anywhere near Afghanistan and I do not have any desire to ever go to Afghanistan.

Now, let me tell you who I am.

I am a Syrian-born Canadian. I moved here with my parents when I was seventeen years old. I went to university and studied hard, and eventually obtained a Masters degree in telecommunications. I met my wife, Monia at McGill University. We fell in love and eventually married in 1994. I knew then that she was special, but I had no idea how special she would turn out to be.

If it were not for her I believe I would still be in prison.

We had our first child, a daughter named Barâa, in February, 1997. She is six years old now. In December, 1997, we moved to Ottawa from Montreal. I took a job with a high tech firm, called The MathWorks, in Boston in 1999, and my job involved a lot of travel within the US.

Then in 2001 I decided to come back to Ottawa to start my own consulting company. We had our second child, Houd, in February, 2002. He is twenty months old now.

So this is who I am. I am a father and a husband. I am a telecommunications engineer and entrepreneur. I have never had trouble with the police, and have always been a good citizen. So I still cannot believe what has happened to me, and how my life and career have been destroyed.

In September 2002, I was with my wife and children, and her family, vacationing in Tunis. I got an email from the MathWorks saying that they might need me soon to assess a potential consulting work for one of their customers. I said goodbye to my wife and family, and headed back home to prepare for work.

I was using my air-miles to travel, and the best flight I could get went from Tunis, to Zurich, to New York, to Montreal. My flight arrived in New York at 2:00 p.m. on September 26th 2002. I had a few hours to wait until my connecting flight to Montreal.

This is when my nightmare began. I was pulled aside at immigration and taken to another area. Two hours later some officials came and told me this was regular procedure they took my fingerprints and photographs.

Then some police came and searched my bags and copied my Canadian passport. I was getting worried, and I asked what was going on, and they would not answer. I asked to make a phone call, and they would not let me.

Then a team of people came and told me they wanted to ask me some questions. One man was from the FBI, and another was from the New York Police Department. I was scared and did not know what was going on. I told them I wanted a lawyer. They told me I had no right to a lawyer, because I was not an American citizen.

They asked me where I worked and how much money I made. They swore at me, and insulted me. It was very humiliating. They wanted me to answer every question quickly. They were consulting a report while they were questioning me, and the information they had was so private I thought this must be from Canada.

I told them everything I knew. They asked me about my travel in the United States. I told them about my work permits, and my business there.

They asked about information on my computer and whether I was willing to share it. I welcomed the idea, but I don't know if they did.

They asked me about different people, some I know, and most I do not.

They asked me about Abdullah Almalki, and I told them I worked with his brother at high tech firms in Ottawa, and that the Almalki family had come from Syria about the same time as mine. I told them I did not know Abdullah well, but had seen him a few times and I described the times I could remember. I told them I had a casual relationship with him.

They were so rude with me, yelling at me that I had a selective memory.

Then they pulled out a copy of my rental lease from 1997. I could not believe they had this. I was completely shocked. They pointed out that Abdullah had signed the lease as a witness. I had completely forgotten that he had signed it for me when we moved to Ottawa in 1997, we needed someone to witness our lease, and I phoned Abdullah's brother, and he could not come, so he sent Abdullah.

But they thought I was hiding this. I told them the truth. I had nothing to hide. I had never had problems in the United States before, and I could not believe what was happening to me.

This interrogation continued until midnight. I was very, very worried, and asked for a lawyer again and again. They just ignored me. Then they put me in chains, on my wrists and ankles, and took me in a van to a place where many people were being held another building by the airport. They would not tell me what was happening.

At 1 in the morning they put me in a room with metal benches in it. I could not sleep. I was very, very scared and disoriented. The next morning they started questioning me again. They asked me about what I think about Bin Laden, Palestine, Iraq. They also asked me about the mosques I pray in, my bank accounts, my email addresses, my relatives, about everything.

This continued on and off for eight hours.

Then a man from the INS came in and told me they wanted me to volunteer to go to Syria. I said no way. I said I wanted to go home to Canada or sent back to Switzerland. He said to me "you are a special interest".

They asked me to sign a form. They would not let me read it, but I just signed it. I was exhausted and confused and disoriented. I had not slept or eaten since I was in the plane.

At about 6 in the evening they brought me some cold McDonalds meal to eat. This was the first food I had eaten since the last meal I had on the plane.

At about eight o'clock they put all the shackles and chains back on, and put me in a van, and drove me to a prison. I later learned this was the Metropolitan Detention Centre. They would not tell me what was happening, or where I was going.

They strip searched me. It was humiliating. They put me in an orange suit, and took me to a doctor, where they made me sign forms, and gave me a vaccination. I asked what it was, and they would not tell me. My arm was red for almost two weeks from that.

They took me to a cell. I had never seen a prison before in my life, and I was terrified. I asked again for a phone call, and a lawyer. They just ignored me. They treated me differently than the other prisoners. They would not give me a toothbrush or toothpaste, or reading material. I did get a copy of the Koran about two days later.

After five days, they let me make a phone call. I called Monia's mother, who was here in Ottawa, and told her I was scared they might send me to Syria, and asked her to help find me a lawyer. They would only let me talk for two minutes.

On the seventh or eighth day they brought me a document, saying they had decided to deport me, and I had a choice of where to be deported. I wrote that I wanted to go to Canada. It asked if I had concerns about going to Canada. I wrote no, and signed it.

The Canadian consul came on October 4, and I told her I was scared of being deported to Syria. She told me that would not happen. She told me that a lawyer was being arranged. I was very upset, and scared. I could barely talk.

The next day, a lawyer came. She told me not to sign any document unless she was present. We could only talk for 30 minutes. She said she would try to help me. That was a Saturday.

On Sunday night at about 9:00 p.m., the guards came to my cell and told me my lawyer was there to see me. I thought it was a strange time, and they took me into a room with seven or eight people in it. I asked where my lawyer was. They told me he had refused to come and started questioning me again. They said they wanted to know why I did not want to go back to Syria. I told them I would be tortured there. I told them I had not done my military service; I am a Sunni Muslim; my mother's cousin had been accused of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and was put in prison for nine years.

They asked me to sign a document and I refused. I told them they could not send me to Syria I would be tortured. I asked again for a lawyer.

At three in the morning they took me back to my cell.

At 3 in the morning on Tuesday, October 8th, a prison guard woke me up and told me I was leaving. They took me to another room and stripped and searched me again. Then they again chained and shackled me. Then two officials took me inside a room and read me what they said was a decision by the INS Director.

They told me that based on classified information that they could not reveal to me, I would be deported to Syria. I said again that I would be tortured there. Then they read part of the document where it explained that INS was not the body that deals with Geneva Convention regarding torture.

Then they took me outside into a car and drove me to an airport in New Jersey. Then they put me on a small private jet. I was the only person on the plane with them. I was still chained and shackled. We flew first to Washington. A new team of people got on the plane and the others left. I overheard them talking on the phone, saying that Syria was refusing to take me directly, but Jordan would take me.

Then we flew to Portland, to Rome, and then to Amman, Jordan. All the time I was on the plane I was thinking how to avoid being tortured. I was very scared. We landed in Amman at 3 in the morning local time on October 9th.

They took me out of plane and there were six or seven Jordanian men waiting for us. They blindfolded and chained me, and put me in a van.

They made me bend my head down in the back seat. Then, these men started beating me. Every time I tried to talk they beat me. For the first few minutes it was very intense.

Thirty minutes later we arrived at a building where they took off my blindfold and asked routine questions, before taking me to a cell. It was around 4:30 in the morning on October 9. Later that day, they took my fingerprints, and blindfolded me and put me in a van. I asked where I was going, and they told me I was going back to Montreal.

About forty-five minutes later, I was put into a different car. These men started beating me again. They made me keep my head down, and it was very uncomfortable, but every time I moved, they beat me again. Over an hour later we arrived at what I think was the border with Syria. I was put in another car and we drove for another three hours.

I was taken into a building, where some guards went through my bags and took some chocolates I bought in Zurich. I asked one of the people where I was and he told me I was in the Palestine branch of the Syrian military intelligence. It was now about 6 in the evening on October 9.

Three men came and took me into a room. I was very, very scared. They put me on a chair, and one of the men started asking me questions. I later learned this man was a colonel. He asked me about my brothers, and why we had left Syria. I answered all the questions.

If I did not answer quickly enough, he would point to a metal chair in the corner and ask "Do you want me to use this?" I did not know then what that chair was for. I learned later it was used to torture people.

I asked him what he wanted to hear. I was terrified, and I did not want to be tortured. I would say anything to avoid torture. This lasted for four hours. There was no violence, only threats this day. At about 1 in the morning, the guards came to take me to my cell downstairs.

We went into the basement, and they opened a door, and I looked in. I could not believe what I saw. I asked how long I would be kept in this place. He did not answer, but put me in and closed the door. It was like a grave. It had no light. It was three feet wide. It was six feet deep.

It was seven feet high. It had a metal door, with a small opening in the door, which did not let in light because there was a piece of metal on the outside for sliding things into the cell.

There was a small opening in the ceiling, about one foot by two feet with iron bars. Over that was another ceiling, so only a little light came through this. There were cats and rats up there, and from time to time the cats peed through the opening into the cell. There were two blankets, two dishes and two bottles. One bottle was for water and the other one was used for urinating during the night. Nothing else. No light.

I spent ten months, and ten days inside that grave.

The next day I was taken upstairs again. The beating started that day and was very intense for a week, and then less intense for another week. That second and the third days were the worst. I could hear other prisoners being tortured, and screaming and screaming. Interrogations are carried out in different rooms.

One tactic they use is to question prisoners for two hours, and then put them in a waiting room, so they can hear the others screaming, and then bring them back to continue the interrogation.

The cable is a black electrical cable, about two inches thick. They hit me with it everywhere on my body. They mostly aimed for my palms, but sometimes missed and hit my wrists they were sore and red for three weeks. They also struck me on my hips, and lower back. Interrogators constantly threatened me with the metal chair, tire and electric shocks.

The tire is used to restrain prisoners while they torture them with beating on the sole of their feet. I guess I was lucky, because they put me in the tire, but only as a threat. I was not beaten while in tire.

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. At the end of the day they told me tomorrow would be worse. So I could not sleep.

Then on the third day, the interrogation lasted about eighteen hours.

They beat me from time to time and make me wait in the waiting room for one to two hours before resuming the interrogation. While in the waiting room I heard a lot of people screaming. They wanted me to say I went to Afghanistan. This was a surprise to me. They had not asked about this in the United States.

They kept beating me so I had to falsely confess and told them I did go to Afghanistan. I was ready to confess to anything if it would stop the torture. They wanted me to say I went to a training camp. I was so scared I urinated on myself twice. The beating was less severe each of the following days.

At the end of each day, they would always say, "Tomorrow will be harder for you." So each night, I could not sleep – I did not sleep for the first four days, and slept no more than two hours a day for about two months. Most of time I was not taken back to my cell, but to the waiting room where I could hear all the prisoners being tortured and screaming.

One time, I heard them banging a man's head repeatedly on a desk really hard.

Around October 17th, the beatings subsided. Their next tactic was to take me in a room,

blindfolded, and people would talk about me. I could hear them saying, "He knows lots of people who are terrorists"; "We will get their numbers"; "He is a liar"; "He has been out of the country for long." Then they would say, "Let's be frank, let's be friends, tell us the truth," and come around the desk, and slap me on the face. They played lots of mind games.

The interrogation and beating ended three days before I had my first consular visit, on October 23. I was taken from my cell and my beard was shaved. I was taken to another building, and there was the colonel in the hallway with some other men and they all seemed very nervous and agitated.

I did not know what was happening and they would not tell me. They never say what is happening. You never know what will happen next. I was told not to tell anything about the beating, then I was taken into a room for a ten minute meeting with the consul. The colonel was there, and three other Syrian officials including an interpreter. I cried a lot at that meeting. I could not say anything about the torture. I thought if I did, I would not get any more visits, or I might be beaten again.

After that visit, about a month after I arrived, they called me up to sign and place my thumb print on a document about seven pages long. They would not let me read it, but I had to put my thumb print and signature on the bottom of each page. It was handwritten.

Another document was about three pages long, with questions: Who are your friends? How long have you been out of the country? Last question was empty lines. They answered the questions with their own handwriting except for the last one where I was forced to write that I had been to Afghanistan.

The consular visits were my lifeline, but I also found them very frustrating. There were seven consular visits, and one visit from members of parliament. After the visits I would bang my head and my fist on the wall in frustration. I needed the visits, but I could not say anything there.

I got new clothes after the December 10th consular visit. Until then, I had been wearing the same clothes since being on the jet from the United States.

On three different occasions in December I had a very hard time. Memories crowded my mind and I thought I was going to lose control, and I just screamed and screamed. I could not breathe well after, and felt very dizzy.

I was not exposed to sunlight for six months. The only times I left the grave was for interrogation, and for the visits. Daily life in that place was hell. When I was detained in New York I weighed about 180 pounds. I think I lost about 40 pounds while I was at the Palestine Branch.

On August 19 I was taken upstairs to see the investigator, and I was given a paper and asked to write what he dictated. If I protested, he kicked me. I was forced to write that I went to a training camp in Afghanistan. They made me sign and put my thumbprint on the last page.

The same day I was transferred to a different place, which I learnt later was the Investigation Branch. I was placed there in a 12 feet by 20 feet collective cell. We were about 50 people in that place.



The next day I was taken to the Sednaya prison. I was very lucky that I was not tortured when I arrived there. All the other prisoners were tortured when they arrived.

Sednaya prison was like heaven for me. I could move around, and talk with other prisoners. I could buy food to eat and I gained a lot of weight there. I was only beaten once there.

On around September 19 or 20, I heard the other prisoners saying that another Canadian had arrived there. I looked up, and saw a man, but I did not recognize him. His head was shaved, and he was very, very thin and pale. He was very weak. When I looked closer, I recognized him. It was Abdullah Almalki. He told me he had also been at the Palestine Branch, and that he had also been in a grave like I had been except he had been in it longer.

He told me he had been severely tortured with the tire, and the cable.

He was also hanged upside down. He was tortured much worse than me. He had also been tortured when he was brought to Sednaya, so that was only two weeks before.

I do not know why they have Abdullah there. What I can say for sure is that no human deserves to be treated the way he was, and I hope that Canada does all they can to help him.

On September 28 I was taken out and blindfolded and put in what felt like a bus and taken back to the Palestine Branch. They would not tell me what was happening, and I was scared I was going back to the grave. Instead, I was put in one of the waiting rooms where they torture people. I could hear the prisoners being tortured, and screaming, again.

The same day I was called in to an office to answer more questions, about what I would say if I came back to Canada. They did not tell me I would be released.

I was put back in the waiting room, and I was kept there for one week, listening to all the prisoners screaming. It was awful.

On Sunday, October 5th I was taken out and into a car and driven to a court. I was put in a room with a prosecutor. I asked for a lawyer and he said I did not need one. I asked what was going on and he read from my confession. I tried to argue I was beaten and did not go to Afghanistan, but he did not listen. He did not tell me what I was charged with, but told me to stamp my fingerprint and sign on a document he would not let me see. Then he said I would be released.

Then I was taken back to the Palestine Branch where I met the head of the Syrian Military Intelligence and officials from the Canadian embassy. And then I was released. I want to conclude by thanking all of the people who worked for my release, especially my wife Monia, and human rights groups, and all the people who wrote letters, and all the members of parliament who stood up for justice.

Of course I thank all of the journalists for covering my story.

The past year has been a nightmare, and I have spent the past few weeks at home trying to learn how to live with what happened to me. I know that the only way I will ever be able to move on in my life and have a future is if I can find out why this happened to me.

I want to know why this happened to me. I believe the only way I can ever know why this



happened is to have all the truth come out in a public inquiry.

My priority right now is to clear my name, get to the bottom of the case and make sure this does not happen to any other Canadian citizens in the future. I believe the best way to go about achieving this goal is to put pressure on the government to call for a public inquiry.

What is at stake here is the future of our country, the interests of Canadian citizens, and most importantly Canada's international reputation for being a leader in human rights where citizens from different ethnic groups are treated no different than other Canadians.

Thank you for your patience.

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