

**Testimony of
Maher Arar
Joint Oversight Hearing:
Rendition to Torture: The Case of Maher Arar
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight
with
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
United States House of Representatives
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I. INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank all of you for your invitation and for giving me this opportunity to share my experiences with you.

I am here today to tell you my story about how I was detained, interrogated, transported to Syria, tortured, and kept there in a 3 foot by 6 foot, unlit grave-like cell, away from my family for nearly a year. The physical and mental torture that I experienced during this time continues to haunt me daily.

I am a victim of extraordinary rendition. I hope that my story will help shed more light on the administration's role in this illegal and immoral practice of outsourcing torture by sending suspects to countries known to practice torture to extract information.

Even though the United States Government prevents me from coming to the United States, I am appearing before you today by video-link because I feel it is my obligation and moral duty as a human being to help prevent what happened to me from happening to other people.

Before I tell you my story, I should like to make one thing perfectly clear: I am not a terrorist. I am not a member of al-Qaeda and do not know anyone who belongs to that group. All I know about al-Qaeda is what I have heard, read and seen in the media. I have never been to Afghanistan or anywhere near Afghanistan. I am a Syrian-born Canadian. I moved to Canada with my parents when I was 17 years old, avoiding the mandatory Syrian military draft. I attended high school in Montreal and eventually attended McGill University. I obtained a Bachelors degree as well as a Masters degree in telecommunications. During my early undergraduate studies, I obtained my Canadian citizenship and, with it, relief from the worry that I would ever be forced to return to Syria to serve in the army. I met my wife, Monia at McGill. 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, our daughter Barâa, in February 1997. She is 10 years old now. In December 1997, we moved to Ottawa from Montreal. I accepted a job with a high tech firm called The MathWorks in Boston in 1999, and my job involved a lot of travel within the United States. In 2001 I decided to come back to Ottawa to start my own consulting company. We had our second child, our son Houd, in February 2002. He is 5 years old now.

This is who I am: a father; a husband; a telecommunications engineer; and an entrepreneur. I have never been charged in the United States, Canada, Syria or Jordan—or any country for that matter—despite the allegations made in the United States that I was a member of al-Qaeda, and despite having been exhaustively investigated I have never had trouble with the police, and have always been a good citizen. I still cannot believe what has happened to me, and how my life, my reputation, and my career have been completely destroyed.

II. INITIAL STOP

In September 2002, I was with my wife and children and her family in Tunisia. My wife, a Canadian citizen, is originally from Tunisia. While there, I got an email from my former employer, The MathWorks, who I was still doing consulting work for, saying that they might need me soon to assess a potential consulting job for one of their customers. I headed back home to prepare for work while my wife and children stayed in Tunisia.

I was using frequent flier miles to travel and the best flight I could get went from Tunis, to Zurich, to New York, to Montreal. So I departed Tunis, spent a night in Zurich, and then departed for Montreal, transiting through New York. My flight arrived in New York at approximately 2:00 p.m. on September 26, 2002. That was when my nightmare began.

I disembarked from the plane and lined up at the immigration counter. When it was my turn, I handed my valid Canadian passport to the immigration officer. When the officer entered my name into the computer, I was pulled aside and taken to another area.

Some time later, officials took my fingerprints and photographs. They told me that this was regular procedure.

Later, the airport police arrived and searched my bags. They also searched my wallet, asked me to boot up my laptop, and copied my Canadian passport. I was getting worried. I asked them what was going on. They would not answer my question. They would not even let me make a phone call.

Then a team, including a member of the FBI and a member of the New York Police Department, told me that they wanted to ask me some questions. They said they would question me and then would let me catch my flight to Montreal. I was scared. I did not know what was going on. No one would answer my questions. 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 interrogated me for nearly five hours. They kept telling me that they would let me go on the next plane if I answered their questions. I had nothing to hide and answered all their questions. I asked for a lawyer again and again. They just ignored me.

During this interrogation, they kept referring to a thick written report. The information that they had about me was so private I thought that it must be from Canada. They asked me where I worked and how much money I made. They swore at me and insulted me. It was *humiliating*. They wanted me to answer every question quickly. I told them everything I knew. But they treated me as if I were lying and accused me of having a selective memory.

They asked me about my travel within 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 was. In fact, I welcomed the idea but they never brought the laptop into the room to look at it.

They asked me about different people, a few I know and most I do not. They asked me about Abdullah Almalki, and I told them I worked with his brother, Nazih, at high tech firms in Ottawa, and that the Almalki family had come from Syria about the same time as mine so our families knew of each other. I told them I did not know Mr. Almalki 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. I told them I had last seen him in October 2001 when we had lunch together. I didn't understand why they were questioning me about Mr. Almalki.

Then they pulled out a copy of my rental application/lease from 1997. They pointed out that Mr. Almalki had signed the application. I had completely forgotten that he had signed it for me when we moved to Ottawa in 1997. When we first moved there, the members of the Almalki family were some of the only people we knew in Ottawa at that time. That is why I had phoned Mr. Almalki's brother, Nazih. He could not come, so he sent his brother Abdullah instead. This was a small detail from five years before that I had forgotten.

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

After about five hours, at around 9:00 p.m., these men left and I was brought back to the waiting area where I was questioned by a female INS officer. She was behind a screen and typing. She asked many of the same questions but focused on whether I was affiliated with any groups. This interrogation lasted for another three hours. I had to stand during the entire interrogation.

By this point, I had been detained and interrogated for about ten hours. My requests for a phone call and a lawyer were ignored and no one would tell me what was going on.

III. TRANSFER TO AIRPORT FACILITY

Despite the fact that they informed me they were going to let me go, the airport police came and chained my wrists and ankles. They took me in a van to a place where many people

were being held in another building by the airport. I kept asking but they would not tell me what was happening. They said that I would know tomorrow.

At 1:00 a.m. on September 27, 2002, they put me in a room with metal benches in it. I could not sleep at all. There was no bed and the lights were on all night. I was very, very scared, tired and disoriented.

At 9:00 a.m. the next morning, I was questioned again on and off for approximately eight hours. They asked me about what I think about Bin Laden. I told them that I do not agree with Bin Laden's views and think he is crazy. They also asked me about Palestine and Iraq. I told them that I support peace, but think that there must be just peace. They then asked me about my bank accounts, my email addresses, my relatives, the mosques I pray in, about everything. I responded to everything. They asked me to open my palm pilot. I opened it and showed them everything they asked to see.

At around 5:00 p.m., a man from U.S. Immigration arrived and asked me to volunteer to go to Syria. I refused to agree to that. I said I wanted to go home to Canada or be sent back to Switzerland where my flight had originated. I repeated this to them again and again throughout my detention. He told me that I was of "special interest." I asked again for a lawyer and was again refused.

Then they asked me to sign a form - they would not let me read the questions and answers. I was exhausted, confused and disoriented, so I just signed it.

Around that time, they finally brought me a cold meal - this was the first food I had eaten in over 30 hours.

IV. TRANSFER TO METROPOLITAN DETENTION CENTER

It was now the evening of my second day in detention. At about 8:00 p.m. on September 27th, I was again shackled and chained and driven to what I later learned was the Metropolitan Detention Center ("MDC") in Brooklyn, and placed in the maximum security section. They told me not to move or talk in the van. They would not tell me what was happening or where I was going.

At the prison, they strip-searched me. It was humiliating and against my religion to be naked in front of others. They put me in an orange suit and took me to a doctor, where they made me sign forms and gave me a shot. I asked what it was for and they would not tell me. My arm was red for almost two weeks from the shot.

They took me to a cell where I was placed in solitary confinement. I had never seen a prison before in my life. I was terrified. I asked again for a phone call and for a lawyer. They just ignored me.

Scared and tired, I was not able to sleep that night until early in the morning. This is the first time I had slept since leaving Zurich two days earlier. At the MDC, they treated me differently than the other prisoners. For example, they would not give me a toothbrush or

toothpaste, or reading material. I was also frequently videotaped from the time I arrived at MDC.

For five days, my family did not know where I was. Finally, on October 1st, I was allowed to make a phone call to my wife's mother in Canada. In the brief two minutes that I was allowed, I tried to tell her where I was, to explain my fears about being sent to Syria, and that I needed a lawyer.

Around October 2nd, I was given a document that said that I was inadmissible to the United States because I was not a U.S. citizen, was a native of Syria and a citizen of Syria and Canada, and was a member of al-Qaeda.

On October 3rd, Canadian Consul Maureen Girvan visited me and I showed her the document I had been given. I told her clearly that I was scared of being deported to Syria. She told me that that would not happen and that a lawyer was being arranged. I was very upset and scared. I could barely talk.

Around October 3rd or 4th, INS officials brought me a document, saying they had decided to deport me and I had a choice of where to be deported. I designated that I wanted to go to Canada. It asked if I had concerns about going to Canada, and I indicated no.

On Saturday, October 5th, an immigration lawyer, Amal Oummih, came to see me. We could only talk for a short period. She said she would try to help me. She told me not to sign any document unless she was present. She assured me that, according to U.S. law, if I was going to be deported I could choose to go to Canada.

On Sunday, October 6th at about 9:00 p.m., the guards came to my cell and told me that my lawyer was waiting for me. I thought it was a strange time for my lawyer to visit. They took me into a room with seven or eight people in it. My lawyer was not there. I asked where my lawyer was. They told me my lawyer had refused to come and started questioning me. I told them I did not want to proceed without my lawyer.

Nonetheless, they continued to question me. Throughout the interrogation, I asked again and again for a lawyer. They just continued questioning me. They wanted to know why I did not want to go back to Syria. I told them that I would be tortured there. I explained to them that, having left when I was 17, I had not done my military service. I had heard many stories from my family of people being imprisoned for this. It was not hard to imagine what would likely happen there. Like many police state countries, Syria does not let you renounce your citizenship. To them, you remain a citizen and subject to their authority regardless of your wishes.

Also, by this point, it had been alleged that I was a member of al Qaeda. I was afraid that if I were sent to Syria and falsely labeled as a member of al Qaeda, I would be tortured.

They asked me to sign a document and I refused. I told them again they could not send me to Syria as I would be tortured. I asked again for a lawyer. Around 3:00 a.m. on October 7th, after about six hours of questioning, they took me back to my cell.

Around 3:00 or 4:00 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 where I was strip-searched again and chained and shackled. Then two officials took me inside a room and read me what they said was a decision by the Immigration Director. They told me that, based on classified information that they could not reveal to me and because I knew a number of men in Canada, including Abdullah Almalki and Ahmad Abou El Maati, they had decided to deport me to Syria.

I said again that I would be tortured there. I was extremely disoriented and emotional. I kept crying but they did not really seem to care. Then the lady just flipped a couple of pages and read a part of the document telling me that they were not the office that deals with the Torture Convention.

V. TRANSFER TO SYRIA

I was driven to an airport in New Jersey and placed on a luxurious, private jet. I found that to be extremely strange. I was the only passenger; there were two pilots, a flight attendant - who was the only woman - and approximately four other people, who were my escorts. I remained chained and shackled.

We flew first to Washington, where we stayed for about an hour. Everyone except the pilot and the flight attendant left the plane. A new team of four people boarded the plane. I heard them talking on the phone saying that Syria was refusing to take me directly, but that Jordan would. I also overheard information that identified them as belonging to the Special Removal Unit.

Then we flew to Maine for refueling. Approximately half an hour later, the plane departed again. Eventually I could tell where the plane was going, because they did not blindfold me and there was a small overhead screen showing the trajectory of the plane on a map. It indicated that the plane's destination was Rome, Italy. We landed in Rome and stayed there for less than an hour, and then flew to Amman, Jordan. I was chained and shackled in the plane nearly the entire trip. The men would even go to the washroom with me. During the last two hours of the flight however, they removed the chains and shackles and allowed me to move freely.

I had a conversation with the head of the team, who told me that his family was originally from Syria and that his last name was Kouri. When I asked whether he spoke Arabic his response was negative. I shared with him my fears of being tortured. I thought that when they put me on the plane they had forgotten to bring my luggage. I mentioned this to Mr. Kouri. Then, before I was taken off the plane in Amman, Mr. Kouri asked me to remove the brown suit that they had given me to wear when I left MDC, and he gave me a T-shirt and a pair of jeans.

The whole time I was on the plane I was thinking about how to avoid being tortured. I then became convinced that I was being sent to Syria exactly for that purpose.

The plane landed in Amman at about 2:00 a.m. on October 9th. They took me out of the plane and we were met by six or seven men. These men, who I saw for no more than 5 seconds, spoke in Arabic only. I was blindfolded, chained, and put in a van. I was forced to bend my

head down in the back seat. I was beaten on the back of my head. Every time I tried to talk, they beat me.

Thirty minutes later we arrived at a building, which seemed to be a detention center but it was very quiet, and I could feel that I was being transported in elevators. I was taken to a cell where my blindfold was removed, and later I was taken to be inspected by a doctor with military clothes. They asked routine questions. I was then blindfolded again and brought to a cell and placed in solitary confinement.

I was kept in Jordan for about ten hours. During this time, I was questioned by an investigator who told me that I had nothing to worry about and that I would go to Syria to do my military service. They took my fingerprints and photograph, 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. The men in the car started beating me again. They made me keep my head down. 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 heard a man say, "He is the guy. We are giving him to you." I was transferred to a different car.

VI. TRANSFER TO SYRIAN PALESTINE BRANCH

Two or three hours later, we arrived and I was taken into a room. This is when I saw photos of the Syrian president, and when I realized I was indeed in Syria. Two guards who were in the room went through my hand luggage and took some chocolates I had bought in Zurich and my watch. When I asked one of the people where I was, he told me I was in the Palestine branch of the Syrian Military Intelligence. It was about 6:00 p.m. on October 9.

Then three men came and took me into a room. I was very scared. They put me on a chair and one of the men started asking me questions. I later learned that this man was a colonel. He asked me about my brothers and why my family had left Syria. I answered all the questions. If I did not answer quickly enough, he would point to a metal chair in the room and he would ask: 'Do you want me to use this?' I did not know then what the chair was for but learned later that it was used to torture people. I was extremely terrified and did not want to be tortured. The interrogation lasted for about four hours. There was no violence on the first day - only threats.

At about 1:00 a.m., guards came to take me to the basement. They opened a door, and I looked in. I could not believe the cell 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.

The cell was like a grave. It was three feet wide, six feet deep, and seven feet high. It had a metal door, with a small opening in it that 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 urinated 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.

VII. BEATINGS

The day after I arrived I was taken upstairs. The beating started that day and was very intense for a week and then less intense for another week. They beat me with a shredded electrical cable about 2 inches in diameter. One of the men beating me said that he could not believe the United States would send someone innocent here.

During this period of intense interrogation, I was usually taken to a waiting room from where I could hear other prisoners being tortured and screaming. I would be questioned for a couple of hours, put in a waiting room to hear the other screams and cries, and then brought back to continue the interrogation. One time, I heard them banging a man's head repeatedly on a desk really hard. The women's screams haunt me the most.

My second and third days there were the worst. They used the cable again and hit me everywhere on my body. One of the interrogators asked if I knew what this was. I was crying. I said, 'Yes, I know what it is. It's a cable.' He said, 'Open your right hand. I opened my right hand and he beat me very strongly. He said, 'Open your left hand.' I opened my left hand. He beat me on my left palm. Then he stopped and asked me questions. I said to him, 'I have nothing to hide.' They mostly aimed at 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.

The interrogators constantly threatened me with the metal chair, tire and electric shocks. The tire is used to restrain prisoners while they torture them by beating on the soles of their feet. I was fortunate because they put me in the tire, but only as a threat. I was not beaten while in the tire.

After the interrogators hit me with the cable, they would beat me with their hands – hitting me on the stomach and on the back of my neck and slapping me in the face. My skin turned blue from bruising where they hit me with the cables, but there was no bleeding. At the end of day they told me that tomorrow would be worse. I could not sleep.

On the third day, the interrogation lasted about 18 hours. During these 18 hours, they beat me, insulted me and made me listen to other people screaming. I begged them to stop. They made me wait in the waiting room for one to two hours before resuming their brutal interrogation. While in the waiting room, I heard a lot of people screaming.

They wanted me to say that I went to Afghanistan. This was a surprise to me. I don't remember being asked about this in the United States. They kept beating me so I confessed falsely and told them I had been to Afghanistan. I was ready to confess to anything if it would stop the torture. They wanted me to say that I went to a training camp and read a list of names of training camps. I said one of them but did not even know where that camp was. I was so scared that I urinated on myself twice during the first days of my interrogation.

After the third day the beating was less severe. On the fourth day, the questions were about my relationship with other people, including Abdullah Almalki. They kept saying that I was a liar to everything that I answered. They continued to punch and hit me.

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 at all. I slept no more than two hours a day for about two months after that.

On or around October 17th, the beatings subsided. Their next tactic was to take me into a room, blindfolded, and have people talk about me. I could hear them saying things like: "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 a long time." Then they would say: "let us be frank;" "let us be friends;" "tell us the truth." They would come near me and one of them would slap me in the face. They constantly used these mind games as an interrogation technique.

VIII. INITIAL INTERROGATION ENDS

The initial interrogation and beatings ended around October 20th. On October 23rd, 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 who seemed very nervous and agitated.

I did not know what was happening and they would not tell me. They then told me that they did not hurt me even though they beat me. I was told not to say anything about the beatings. Then I was taken into a room for a meeting with the Canadian 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. The meeting lasted about ten minutes.

I received a second visit from the Canadian Consul on October 29th. Again, I had Syrian officials and an interrogator with me throughout the meeting.

About a month after I arrived they called me upstairs to sign and place my thumbprint on a document about seven pages long. I was not allowed to read it, but was forced to put my thumb print and signature on the bottom of each page. From what I remember it was handwritten. I was afraid that if I did not sign it the beatings would resume.

Another document was about three pages long, with questions like "Who are your friends?" and "How long have you been out of the country?" The last question was followed by 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. I would have said or signed anything to avoid further beatings.

I received a third visit from the Canadian Consul on November 12th. Again I had Syrian officials and an interpreter with me throughout the meeting. During this meeting I asked for money so I could purchase clothing and supplies. After the meeting, they were angry that I made that request and screamed at me.

The consular visits were my lifeline, but I also found them very frustrating. These meetings were always controlled by the Syrians. There was always someone who spoke English present. There were seven consular visits in total, most of which I describe here, 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 during them.

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

I had a very hard time in December. On three different occasions, memories crowded my mind such that I thought I was going to lose control. I just screamed and screamed. I could not breathe well after these occasions, and felt very dizzy. One time when this happened a guard took me to wash my face.

The only times I left my grave-like cell were for interrogations and for the consular visits I received from the Canadian Embassy. Daily life in that place was hell. I was allowed to bathe once a week with cold water. I was not allowed to exercise. I must have lost about 40 pounds while I was at the Palestine branch. In early April 2003, I was taken from my cell and placed in an outdoor courtyard. This was the first time I had seen sunlight in six months!

Around April 23, 2003, I was taken from my cell and had my beard shaved. I was told to comb my hair and wash my face well. I was taken outside, put in a car, and driven to another building. I was taken into the building and given tea. The Syrian officials seemed very agitated and nervous. I was taken into a room to meet with the Canadian Ambassador to Syria and two Canadian Members of Parliament, Marlene Catterall and Sarkis Assadourian. I was accompanied by my interrogator and other Syrian officials. After I was taken from the room, I overheard officials talking about media coverage of my case.

In June 2003, I was taken outside into the sunshine twice. I asked to meet with an investigator. Eventually, when my request was granted, I asked the Syrian official to have me moved to a cell fit for human beings. He responded by saying that they were very busy because of the situation in Iraq and ordered me back to my cell.

The next month, I asked again for a meeting with an investigator and this request was eventually granted. I told him that I had nothing to do with al Qaeda. The Syrian official asked me why I was accused of this, why they sent a delegation, and why these people hated me so much. I didn't have an answer. At about this point in my imprisonment, I noticed that my skin was turning yellow and felt that I was on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

I received my seventh visit from the Canadian Consul on August 14, 2003. Once again, I was accompanied by Syrian officials and my interrogator. The head of Syrian military intelligence was also there. This time however, I decided to speak out. I had nothing to lose and decided that I would rather be tortured physically than remain in the "grave" and endure the ongoing psychological torture. My interrogator warned me, as usual, to "do like every time, do like every time." However, when asked about anything happening to me recently, I burst out yelling. I told the Canadian Consul, in English, in front of the Syrian officials, about my cell and the conditions that I was living in. The Consul asked if I had been tortured, and I replied "yes of

course, especially at the beginning.” After the meeting, I could see that my interrogator was very angry. From this day until I was released, I lived in fear of being physically tortured again.

On August 19, 2003, I was taken upstairs to see the investigator. I was given a paper and asked to write down what he dictated to me. If I protested, he would just kick me in the arm. I was threatened with the tire. I was forced to write that I went to a training camp in Afghanistan. They made me sign and put my thumb print on the last page.

IX. TRANSFER TO INVESTIGATION BRANCH

That same day, I was taken to another prison, which I learned later was the Investigation Branch. I was placed there in a 12 feet by 20 feet collective cell. There were about 50 people packed into this space. The door could barely be opened because it was so full of people. I spent the night there, where it was very hot. The other prisoners asked me who I was and where I had been. They were shocked to hear how long I had been in the grave.

X. TRANSFER TO SEDNAYA PRISON

The next day, I was blindfolded and driven to the Sednaya prison, which was like heaven for me. I was in a cell with other people. I could move around and talk with other prisoners. I could buy food to eat and gained some of my lost weight.

On or 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 had been tortured even worse than me.

XI. TRANSFER TO PALESTINE BRANCH

On September 28th, a guard called me a few times. I took my time since I thought that he would go away and come back and call me again as this was what usually happened. However, when I eventually approached the guard, he slapped me so hard that I felt dizzy. The guard then hit me on the back of my head.

I was taken out, blindfolded and put in a car. A half an hour later, I arrived at the investigations branch where I had been held before being transferred to Sednaya prison. Then, I was blindfolded again and this time chained and put in what felt like a bus. I was transferred back to the Palestine branch. They would not tell me what was happening. I was extremely scared that I was going back to that underground cell. Instead, I was put in one of the waiting rooms on the same floor where they interrogate and torture people. I could again hear the prisoners being tortured and screaming.

The same day I was called into an office to answer some questions. Those questions mostly related to what I would say if I returned to Canada. They did not tell me I would be released.

I was put back in the waiting room and kept there for one week, listening to all the prisoners screaming and being tortured. That week was just beyond human imagination - to hear people being tortured. The only description I can give you is that my heart was just going to go out of my chest.

XII. TRANSFER TO COURT

On Sunday, October 5, 2003, chains were put on my arms and wrists. I was taken out into a car and driven to the Supreme State Security Court. I was put in a room with a prosecutor. I asked for a lawyer and he said that 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. The prosecutor told me to stamp my finger print and sign a document he would not let me see. Then he told me that I would be released. I was never charged with an offense.

XIII. TRANSFER TO PALESTINE BRANCH

After the visit to court, I was taken back to the Palestine branch where I met the head of Syrian Military Intelligence and officials from the Canadian Embassy. I was put in an embassy car, taken to the Canadian embassy, and finally – after nearly a year of wrongful imprisonment and torture – I was released.

XIV. CONCLUSION

These past few years have been a nightmare for me. Since my return to Canada, I have lived in constant psychological pain. This pain manifests in various forms. I feel emotionally distant from my family, including my wife and children. I am still fragile. I have lost confidence in myself and am easily overwhelmed. I have lost the ability to multi-task, which is essential for my engineering profession. I can no longer concentrate for more than a short time. I have nightmares and recurring flashbacks, and constantly fear flying and being kidnapped again. My body is slowly healing, but the cognitive and psychological scars are still with me.

I am not the same person that I was, and I think that I never will be. Things that I once took for granted are now difficult for me. However, my eyes have opened in a way that they never were before. I am no longer just a simple telecommunications engineer. I now understand how fragile our human rights and freedoms are, and how easily they can be taken from us by the very same governments and institutions that have sworn to protect us. I also 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, and help prevent it from happening to others.

In closing, I should like to thank you again for inviting me to share my experiences with you. I also want to again thank all of the people who worked for my release, especially my wife Monia, and human rights groups, all the people who wrote letters, and all of the journalists who covered my story. I also thank all the members of various governments that stood up for justice.

Finally, I would like to thank those members of the U.S. Congress who have asked for answers to the question of why I was rendered to Syria to be tortured.

I wish for no one to suffer the pain that I have suffered. I can only hope that, in sharing my experiences, the short- and long-term implications of torturing a human being will be better understood and that all governments will seek to stop torture.

Thank you for your time.