



## Press Release

**For immediate release**

### **Commissioner O'Connor orders Officer in Charge of Project AO Canada and Deputy Commissioner of the RCMP to Testify in Public at the Arar Inquiry**

**Ottawa, May 12, 2005** – In an important ruling, Commissioner Dennis R. O'Connor, who heads the Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar, ordered two senior members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to testify in public at the Inquiry. The two members of the force are the Officer in charge of Project AO Canada – the project that was presumably involved in the investigation of M. Arar - and Deputy Commissioner Garry Loepky.

In his ruling, Justice O'Connor reviews the various reasons invoked by RCMP counsel to preclude the public testimony of RCMP officers. The Commissioner concludes that there are significant advantages to public testimony.

While acknowledging that some RCMP evidence will not be made public because of the government's National Security Confidentiality (NSC) claims, Justice O'Connor points out that much evidence can be made public and that it will tell an interesting and informative story about the RCMP investigation relating to Mr. Arar. He also said that he considers calling this evidence important for the credibility of the Inquiry: *"...calling RCMP evidence in public has to do with the credibility of this Inquiry. The RCMP played a central role in the events that gave rise to the Inquiry. If possible, this being a public Inquiry, the public should hear evidence about the RCMP's involvement."* Justice O'Connor also said that making this evidence public would give Mr. Arar the opportunity to ask questions about such information.

Justice O'Connor further concluded that the evidence could be called in a manner that avoids unfair prejudice to individual witnesses as well as the RCMP itself. To address this concern he states in his ruling that the public and the media should refrain from drawing conclusions without having heard all of the evidence: *"...the public should refrain from prematurely drawing conclusions critical to individuals and the RCMP when they have not had the opportunity to hear all of the evidence. I will repeat this direction as I consider necessary throughout the RCMP evidence."*

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*Established under Part I of the Inquiries Act, the Arar Inquiry was set up on the recommendation of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to investigate and report on the actions of Canadian officials in relation to Maher Arar. The Commissioner is also mandated to make recommendations that he considers advisable on an arm's length review mechanism for the activities of the RCMP with respect to national security.*

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