



## **Canadian Centre for International Justice**

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### **HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES CALL ON CANADA TO RETURN TO LEADERSHIP ROLE ON INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE**

--June 26, 2008, Ottawa.

Canada is not living up to its reputation as a defender of human rights and a leader in international justice. This according to a panel of human rights advocates - including torture survivor Maher Arar, former Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, and Aboriginal rights activist Ellen Gabriel - convened by the newly-created Canadian Centre for International Justice (CCIJ). CCIJ is calling on the Canadian government not to back away from its previous role as a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, and to prosecute war criminals living in Canada.

"Canada cannot have it both ways: it can either choose to be complacent about the rolling back of human rights, or it can choose the path that most Canadians are proud of--an emphasis on the prevention of war crimes and torture through justice, and respect for human rights," said Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian who was tortured in Syria after being falsely accused of having ties to terrorism. "The world needs leadership from Canada."

"Canada was a leader in the development of international justice mechanisms like the International Criminal Court," said Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg and one of the architects of the 'human security' approach to global issues. "We need strong continued support for these mechanisms, and we also now need investigations and prosecutions in countries like Canada for torture and other crimes. We look at Sudan, Colombia, Myanmar—and many other countries—and we know that human rights abuses have not gone away. Justice can help to break the cycle."

The Government of Canada estimates that hundreds of war criminals and major human rights abusers live in Canada. While Canada passed new war crimes legislation in 2000, this law has been used only once in the eight years since, in a case involving a former Rwandan militia who allegedly carried out torture, sexual violence and other atrocities in the genocide of 1994.

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According to Jayne Stoyles, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for International Justice, “Justice is also critical in the healing processes of survivors. It is estimated that up to one in three refugees to Canada has experienced torture or war trauma, and the psychological impact makes it very difficult to get on with their lives, support their families and participate in their communities.”

“Torture and other atrocities are not some distant reality of no relevance to Canada,” added Ellen Gabriel, President of Quebec Native Women and Member of the Board of Directors of the Native Women’s Association of Canada. “In addition to the experiences of newcomers to Canada, Prime Minister Harper’s recent apology to indigenous Canadians acknowledged the inter-generational damage that resulted from the torture and other abuses in residential schools, and from the general policy of assimilation. The apology and other forms of justice are critical to the healing processes of survivors in this context as well.”

The panel was convened today to mark the United Nations International Day in Support of Survivors of Torture. The Canadian Centre for International Justice works with survivors of genocide, torture and other atrocities to seek redress and bring perpetrators to justice. Please visit our web site at: [www.ccij.ca](http://www.ccij.ca).