

## **Arar's wife warns rights endangered by security issues**

By Neil Scott

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Anti-terrorism measures adopted by the federal government give Canadians "the illusion of security while in fact taking away their hard-earned civil liberties," a noted human rights advocate charged, in Regina Saturday

The comment was made by Monia Mazigh in a presentation to about 100 people at a conference held at the University of Regina on national security and the preservation of the Canadian cultural mosaic.

Mazigh, who came into prominence after the much publicized case in which her Canadian husband -- Maher Arar -- was deported from the U.S. to Syria and subsequently tortured, called on the Canadian government to take a strong stand against torture both at home and abroad.

She specifically called on Canada to take a stronger stand against acts of torture anywhere in the world, including torture by the U.S. government or by allies of the U.S. government.

Mazigh questioned how any civilized country could condone the use of terrorism or remain silent about it.

Even a mild use of torture -- that some people might argue is acceptable to combat the threat posed by international terrorism -- starts society sliding down "a very dangerous slope," in which progressively more cruel and inhumane forms of torture gradually become acceptable, Mazigh warned.

Expanding her discussion beyond just the issue of torture, Mazigh said existing federal legislation passed to combat terrorism gives the Canadian government too much power to take actions in too much secrecy that would potentially violate the rights of citizens.

A better balance between preserving civil liberties and protecting citizens from terrorist attacks is needed, Mazigh said.

Marc Whittingham, who attended the conference as a representative of Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness Canada, agreed there needs to be a balance between protecting security and preserving civil liberties.

But Whittingham insisted federal government policies do reflect a commitment to preserving both security and civil liberties. The government "has shown time and time again it is committed to maintaining these values," Whittingham said.

Riazuddin Ahmed, the president of the Saskatchewan-based Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ) organization, said he believes the Canadian government should pass a law making it illegal for Canadian citizens to fight in foreign wars unless they do so as part of the Canadian Armed Forces.

On a historical basis, such a law might have prevented Canadian volunteers from participating in the Spanish Civil War or for volunteering to serve in the U.S. Army during the War in Viet Nam, as some Canadians did.

Looking directly at the present situation, Ahmed said he does not think it is appropriate for Canadian citizens to get involved in the fighting occurring in the Middle East.

There is also a need for the Muslim community to get more proactive, in helping to insure that the teachings of the Islamic religion are not misinterpreted or misused by terrorists, Ahmed said.

Saturday's conference was organized by the Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ) organization in conjunction with the Muslim Students' Organization.

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