

Costly consular blunders

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Editorial

Canadians are paying a high cost - in shame and tax dollars - for Ottawa's callous treatment of citizens who happen to be Muslim.

It cost a fortune to make good to Maher Arar, who was shipped to Syria to be tortured. He got \$10.5 million and an apology. The probe cost \$23 million or more.

Now Suaad Hagi Mohamud is suing Ottawa for \$2.5 million. She, too, wants an apology. And an independent inquiry.

Mohamud richly deserves the apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper that she demanded yesterday, along with compensation for her three-month ordeal in Kenya. When she needed help, Canadian diplomats rejected her proofs of Canadian identity, called her an imposter, seized her passport, stranded her for months and abandoned her to be charged and jailed. Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon surfaced only long enough to fault Mohamud for not doing enough to prove her identity. Now he has gone underground.

Yet the Star's John Goddard reported yesterday that Mohamud's Toronto MP, Joe Volpe, contacted Cannon and his parliamentary secretary Deepak Obhrai in mid-June and followed up with 20 urgent letters, emails, faxes and phone calls highlighting her plight. He also alerted Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan.

Given Volpe's efforts, Cannon's obtuseness is indefensible. Moreover, Harper says he became aware of the Mohamud case only last week, many weeks after the Star broke the story and months after her ordeal began. Harper instructed Cannon and Van Loan to look into their officials' roles in the case. Ten days later, we're still waiting.

A citizen has been abused by the system. Politicians are diving for cover. Canadians are kept in the dark. And the clamour for an inquiry grows. Here we go again. Ottawa spends millions, and learns nothing.