

November 9, 2009

Hon. Peter Van Loan  
Minister of Public Safety

**RE: Health status of Mohammad Mahjoub – 162 days on hunger strike**

Dear Minister Van Loan,

As health professionals, we are deeply concerned about the health status of Mohammad Mahjoub, who is detained at the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre (KIHC) under a security certificate. After more than 5 months of a liquids-only hunger strike, we have serious reasons to believe that Mr. Mahjoub will die or, at minimum, be permanently impaired if he remains on hunger strike much longer

As of today (November 9, 2009) Mohammad Mahjoub has been on hunger strike for 162 days. During all this time he has been drinking only orange juice, apple juice and water.

On October 15, the physician who has been monitoring Mr. Mahjoub's health on behalf of KIHC, Dr. Allen McBride, testified before the Federal Court that he had "grave concerns" about Mr. Mahjoub's health. More specifically, Dr. McBride expressed fear that Mr. Mahjoub would die if his hunger strike continued. At that point Mohammad Mahjoub had already lost about 25% of his body weight since the beginning of the hunger strike. Prolonged undernutrition forces the body to catabolise, or "eat" itself, first fat, then lean muscle and finally vital organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys.

Based on multiple scientific studies of the effects of long-term caloric deficiency states in the context of famines, anorexia nervosa or disease-related cachexia, we believe that Mr. Mahjoub is at imminent risk of severe hypotension, bradycardia, cardiac arrhythmia, renal failure, and a variety of other potentially life-threatening disorders. We are particularly concerned about the risk of sudden death due to cardiac arrhythmia as this is a common complication of prolonged, severe undernutrition that frequently occurs without warning while the person is still apparently functional (i.e., able to walk and communicate.)

Death often occurs even in young, otherwise healthy people after prolonged self-starvation (e.g., young women with anorexia). Mohammad Mahjoub is at even greater risk because he is 50 years old, has hepatitis C, and was subjected to torture in his country of origin. In addition he has been detained for over 9 years, often in solitary confinement, and has been on lengthy hunger strikes on several occasions. These antecedents increase the likelihood that Mr. Mahjoub may experience life-threatening consequences.

In 2000-2002, over a hundred Turkish political prisoners on a similar hunger strike, consisting of sweetened lemonade, salt and water, died after periods varying between 130 to 250 days, with the maximum number of deaths occurring at about 170-180 days. Hundreds of other hunger strikers on this fruit juice and water diet sustained long-term disability, notably brain damage.

As health professionals, we call upon you to immediately take the necessary measures to enable Mohammad Mahjoub to put an end to his hunger strike, so as to avoid the very real possibility that he might suffer permanent impairment or death.

Sincerely,

Nazila Bettache, MD, CM. Internal Medicine Resident, Montreal  
Marie Munoz, MD, Family Physician, Montreal  
Janet Cleveland, Ph.D., Psychologist, Montreal  
Gerald van Gurp, MD, Family Physician, Montreal  
Helen Hudson, M.Sc. (A), RN, Montreal  
Mulugeta Abai, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Toronto  
Scott Weinstein, Nurse, Montreal  
Sophie Schoen, Nurse candidate, Montreal  
Jane Pritchard, MD, Family Physician, Toronto  
Sandra Leduc, Clinical Dietitian, Kingston  
Mandeep Dhillon, MD, Mexico City  
Anne-Marie Gallant, Nurse, Montreal  
Catherine Landry, Physical Rehabilitation student, Montreal  
Kanwar Anit Singh Saini, MSc(A) I, Speech Language Pathology student, Montreal  
Farha Najah Hussain, M.Sc.A II, Speech-Language Pathology student, Montreal  
Chantal Gravel, M.Ps., Psychologist, Montreal  
Sylvie Laurion, Ph.D., Psychologist Montreal  
Marie-Jo Ouimet, Family Physician, Montréal  
Kathy Hardill, RNEC, Nurse Practitioner, L'Amable, ON  
Marie Beauregard, MD, Family Physician, Montreal  
Catherine Gagnon, RN, MSc(N)-PHCNP student, Val Morin  
Renée Joyal, MD, Physician, Drummondville  
Michaela Hynie, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Toronto  
Samir Shaheen-Hussain, MD CM, FRCPC (Pediatrics), Montreal  
Ashley Wazana, Psychiatrist, Montreal  
Lucien Chiasson, Bsc, RN, Montreal  
Susan McGrath, PhD, Professor of Social Work, Toronto  
Olivier Sabella, M.D., Physician, Montreal  
Alain Mignault, Ph.D., Psychology Researcher, Montreal  
Khadija Benabdallah, Ph.D., Acupuncturist, Montréal  
Yaameen Chanda BSc, McGill Med2 student, Montreal  
Chrystèle Chalhoub, Occupational Therapist, Montreal  
Jim Sugiyama, MD, CCFP, Family Physician, Toronto

cc Barbara Jackman, barrister and solicitor

Adriel Weaver, barrister and solicitor

Richard Comerford, CBSA

Paul Porrior, CBSA

Elliott Gray, KIHC

Cathie Kench, KIHC

Kimberly Poirier, KIHC

Please respond to:

Janet Cleveland, Ph.D.  
7085 Hutchison, #204.2.3  
Montreal, QC  
H3N 1Y9  
Fax: 514-380-8147  
Email: [janetcleveland@yahoo.com](mailto:janetcleveland@yahoo.com)

OR

Nazila Bettache, MD  
Email: [nazila.bettache@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:nazila.bettache@mail.mcgill.ca)