

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Jack Letts Case: RCMP receives torture complaint against Kurdish forces in Syria**

- A complaint has been filed with the RCMP against Kurdish authorities for the torture of Canadian citizen, Jack Letts
- Jack has been detained without charge in Northeast Syria since 2017
- Transcripts of Jack's contact with his family and Global Affairs Canada allege that he has been tortured and subjected to long periods in solitary confinement
- Torture is a criminal offence under Canadian law, and Jack is a Canadian citizen, therefore RCMP has jurisdiction to launch an investigation into these allegations even if the torture occurred outside of Canada's borders
- Canada has offered next to no assistance to Jack, refusing to repatriate him on contradictory arguments regarding a lack of consular presence in Syria
- A UN complaint was submitted in May against Canada's action - and inaction – towards Jack which amounts to a breach of Jack's right to life
- A federal case has also been launched against GAC by the families of 26 detained Canadians for its refusal to repatriate their loved ones or provide any consular support
- A [petition](#) has been launched asking the Canadian government to repatriate Jack and the other Canadian citizens who are currently being held in Northeast Syria.

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021

OTTAWA – Yesterday, the RCMP received an official complaint against Kurdish authorities for the torture of Canadian citizen Jack Letts.

Jack has been held in a Kurdish-run detention facility in Northeast Syria without charge or access to any legal assistance since 2017. Notwithstanding the alleged torture, this alone amounts to arbitrary detention and is therefore illegal under international law.

The RCMP was presented with a dossier of evidence, including transcripts of Jack's contact with Global Affairs Canada and his family, which allege torture by the Kurdish authorities. In a message to his mother in July 2017 Jack stated that *"I'm scared of electricity. It's one of my fears. I've actually been tortured..."* Jack's parents, John and Sally, have not heard directly from Jack since that day.

Amongst the evidence presented to the RCMP is a transcript of a phone conversation between Jack and GAC in 2018 in which he reveals that he had been tortured and also subjected to long periods in solitary confinement. Jack explained to the GAC officer that *"I spent 35 days in a room slightly taller than I am, and about half that wide, with no toilet, nothing. 35 days."* GAC has not investigated this further.

Torture is a crime according to the Canadian Criminal Code. The RCMP has the authority to investigate allegations of torture that are committed in countries other than Canada if the complainant is about a Canadian citizen, as Jack is. Consequently, the Kurdish perpetrators of Jack's torture are liable to be investigated and prosecuted under Canadian law.

Jack is one of a number of foreign citizens held by Kurdish authorities in circumstances where their country of citizenship has failed to protect their individual rights. It is believed that there are currently at least 45 Canadians including 25 young children awaiting repatriation. In Jack's case, GAC has offered Jack no proactive support or assistance since 2017. GAC claims that it does not have sufficient consular presence in Syria to facilitate Jack's repatriation. However, the initial access of

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GAC officials to Jack and the recent repatriation of a child and mother refutes this.

A [UN complaint](#) was submitted in May against the Canadian government for acting in bad faith, and only taking responsibility for their citizens when it suits them politically. This has amounted to a violation of Jack's right to life.

GAC have been criticised in the past for their unwillingness to provide consular assistance or attempt the repatriation of Canadian citizens currently being held in Northeast Syria. This includes a case in the federal court brought by 26 families.

A [petition](#) has been launched to get the Canadian government to step up to their duties and repatriate Jack along with the other Canadian citizens being held by Kurdish forces.

John Letts, who met with the RCMP to discuss Jack's case said, *"Nothing prepares you as a parent to hear your child tell you they have been tortured. For years we were scared of saying anything in case there would be retaliation against him by the Kurdish forces that are holding him, but it's been almost 5 years and our silence has not made the situation any better. We don't even know if he is still alive. The government has to do something to start repatriating all the Canadians that are being kept in torturous conditions in both the camps and detention facilities. I trust that the RCMP will take this seriously and investigate the allegations we presented to them in full."*

-ENDS-

### NOTES

*Canadian Criminal Code:*

**7 (3.7)** The RCMP has authority to investigate allegations of torture that are committed in countries other than Canada if the complainant is a Canadian citizen.

**269.1 (1)** Every official, or every person acting at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of an official, who inflicts torture on any other person is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years.