

## **Public Will-Say Statement**

### **Gian Singh Sandhu**

Gian Singh Sandhu is a leading figure in the Canadian Sikh community. He has been a resident of Canada, since 1970. He has been an active member of the Canadian Sikh community since that time. His volunteer work towards the promotion of human right has caused him to travel extensively throughout Canada and abroad.

In 1985 at the time of crash of Air India Flight 182, Mr. Sandhu was the President of the World Sikh Organization of Canada. At that time, the WSO had in excess of 21,000 individual members, and 56 supporting Sikh institutions in Canada, representing roughly 70% of the Canadian Sikh population. The WSO advocated peaceful resolution to the Punjab conflict, and unconditional support of the Canadian charter of Rights and Freedoms, the promotion of which based a majority of WSO's activities.

As the premier Sikh voice in Canada, WSO was often approached by CSIS and the RCMP in relation to providing ongoing support for the Air India investigation. Mr. Sandhu has first hand experience dealing with CSIS and RCMP during and after those turbulent times. Contrary to the common belief that the Canadian security agencies (CSIS and RCMP) did not have the confidence of the Sikh community, Mr. Sandhu believes otherwise. He encouraged the Sikh community to co-operate with the CSIS and RCMP during the Air India investigation.

It was not until it was publicly revealed that CSIS had erased a number of surveillance tapes, that Mr. Sandhu and others within the Sikh community lost confidence in CSIS and the RCMP.

Mr. Sandhu appeared before SIRC and demanded a public inquiry both into the erasing of surveillance tapes and the investigation of the crash of Air India Flight #182.

Mr. Sandhu became concerned that some CSIS investigators were adopting intimidation tactics in their investigation of the Sikh community. He met with CSIS Director Reid Mordon to discuss these intimidation tactics, and emphasized that CSIS resources should be redirected to solving the Air India crash rather than visiting every Gurdwara and questioning every Sikh.

Mr. Sandhu made presentations to the Hon. James Kelleher, Solicitor General of Canada in 1986, to consider recruiting Sikhs in the RCMP to help speed up the investigation process.

Mr. Sandhu feels that the RCMP was doing a good job in terms of protecting people within the Sikh community from death threats. At one point, he was notified by the RCMP that there was a threat on his life, which had been discovered through intercepted phone conversations. The RCMP provided Mr. Sandhu with adequate protection and security.

The source of the widespread "intimidation and fear mongering" that was going in the Sikh community, as alleged by earlier witnesses, has been mis-stated. From Mr. Sandhu's experience, the source was mostly external to the Canadian Sikh community, rather than internal to it.

**In his testimony, it is expected that Mr. Sandhu will state the following:**

### **1. Background**

- Mr. Sandhu was born in Punjab, India
- He served in the Indian Air Force before moving to Canada.
- He immigrated to Canada in 1970 and took residence in Williams Lake, where he was employed in the lumber industry.
- After working at middle and senior management positions, he established his own lumber company in 1981.
- Mr. Sandhu is a successful businessman and his Group of Companies currently employs in excess of 250 people.
- He has been a college instructor teaching industrial first aid, purchasing and operational management business programs.
- He was a national nominee for "Entrepreneur of the Year" award.
- He has been awarded the "ORDER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA"
- He is a recipient of two "Queens' Golden jubilee Medals" for community service, one through the Federal Government and the 2<sup>nd</sup> through the British Columbia Government.

## **2. Community Involvement**

- Mr. Sandhu is an active figure in both the Sikh community of Canada and the larger Canadian community.
- In 1971 Mr. Sandhu established the first Punjabi Canadian Association in the interior of British Columbia with mandate to bridge cultural gap and help integration of the Sikhs in Canada.
- He has served as President of two Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship)
- He has served on the Economic Development and Housing Committees for the city of Williams Lake.
- He has served as Director of the Cariboo Lumber Manufacturing Association.
- He has served as a member of the Sectoral Advisory Group on International Trade ("SAGIT").
- He has served on the Cariboo College Advisory Council.
- Mr. Sandhu is currently a Director of the Council of Forest Industry ("COFI").
- He is a member of Canadian Wood Council ("CWC") Working Group on finger jointed lumber.
- In addition to personally contributing a significant amount, Mr. Sandhu has helped raise funds needed to establish a "Sikh Studies Chair" at the University of British Columbia.
- 1984 Mr. Sandhu was the founding President of World Sikh Organization of Canada and served the Sikh community for 4 years (1984 -1989) at the National level and 4 years (1989-1993) at the International level.
- He is currently the Senior Policy Advisor of the World Sikh Organization.
- He has established two bursaries for high school graduates wanting to pursue higher education.
- Mr.Sandhu's philanthropic contributions have helped to build a crematorium in the City of Williams Lake, which is being operated by the City for the usage and benefit of the broader Canadian community.
- Mr. Sandhu works very closely with the First Nations bands in British Columbia to help them succeed economically.

## **3. Reaction to Storming of the Golden Temple**

- The storming of the Golden temple by the Indian Army was a turning point for Mr. Sandhu and much of Canadian Sikh community. They were shocked and saddened by this event.

- The attack caused Mr. Sandhu to think much more about his community and his religion.
- The community's anger was evident in mass demonstrations around the world. In excess of 40,000 people attended the Vancouver demonstration in front of the Indian Counsel General's office. A similar size crowd attended the Toronto demonstration.
- In 1984 Sikh groups like the Babbar Khalsa of Talwinder Singh Parmar, Panth Khalsa International of Tara Singh Hayer, and Sikh Student Federation of Canada were already active in Canada. These groups were very small in number, and did not have much widespread support in the Canadian Sikh community.
- The 1984 attack on the Golden Temple, highlighted the need for a unified voice of the Sikh community internationally and nationally.
- Not liking the direction taken by any of these organizations, Mr. Sandhu chose to establish WSO of Canada that could provide a calm and balanced leadership to the Sikh community. The WSO's foundation was peaceful advocacy for human rights. The WSO garnered massive support as it reflected the broad views of a majority of Sikhs in Canada.
- Tara Singh Hayer's organization, Panth Khalsa International, merged with Sikh Student Federation of Canada, and was ultimately taken over by the International Sikh Youth Federation. The ISYF was founded by a couple of refugee claimants to Canada.

#### **4. Reaction to the Crash of Air India Flight 182**

- As with the assault on the Golden Temple, the Sikh community in Canada was shocked and saddened by the news of the crash of Air India Flight 182.
- Gurdwaras across the country held prayers in remembrance of those that were killed in the crash. Approximately 33 people amongst the victims were of Sikh origin.

- Due to the negative media publicity of the Sikh community, Sikh community members attending prayer vigils were often yelled at and shunned at these functions.
- The consensus of the Sikh community at large was that the bombing of Flight 182 was a criminal act committed by insane people and totally contrary to Sikh principles.
- The Sikh community at large felt that this act was going to injure the reputation of the Sikh community for decades to come, and was suspicious that GOI agent provocateurs may have had their hand in it.

## **5. Relationship with Canadian Authorities**

- Mr. Sandhu felt comfortable working with the Canadian authorities. Contrary to many statements that the Sikh community had difficult time trusting Canada's government and its intelligence and security authorities, he noticed compassion and genuine desire to solve this crime.
- Mr. Sandhu was constantly in touch with the Canadian Government and encouraged the Sikh community at large to assist in the investigation of the bombing of Air India Flight 182.
- His organization sponsored a tri-party parliamentary committee to travel to India and assess human rights violation situation in Punjab.
- Mr. Sandhu constantly warned the Canadian authorities that information received from the Indian Government and their intelligence agencies should be scrutinized before being accepted on its face value.
- The Sikh community was worried that the open ended policy of exchange of information between the Canadian and the Indian authorities would be misused by the Indian authorities that had no regard for protection of human rights, and would jeopardize AI investigation.
- The Sikh community felt that as time passed the Canadian authorities became victims of GOI propaganda that every Sikh

who believed in a separate Sikh homeland was an extremist and a potential terrorist. It was this ultimate “buy in” into this theory that resulted in many members of the Sikh community losing their confidence and trust in the Canadian authorities, including CSIS and the RCMP.

- Mr. Sandhu believes that although there are a number of Sikh and Punjabi speaking officers in the provincial police and the RCMP, there is still work to be done in building trust. Many of the officers in leadership positions today, were the ones who were often on the receiving end of this biased perspective of Sikhs (ie. separatist equals terrorist).
- The WSO has been providing training workshops to RCMP officers so that they have some level of cultural sensitivity when dealing with the Sikh community. However, more important than cultural sensitivity, is cultural competency training. Adding more Sikh officers is not the solution to working within non English speaking communities – rather managing and understanding sources of information, is the key.

## **6. Community Perceptions of Sikh Extremists**

- The Canadian Sikh community was nearly unanimous in rejecting violent extremism before and after the bombing of Air India Flight 182.
- The Sikh community has participated in prayers and candle light vigils for the victims of this heinous crime.
- Although Mr. Sandhu favours the creation of a Sikh homeland in India, he has always believed this must be done through democratic means.

## **7. Canadian Sikhs and Sikh Community Institutions**

- Mr. Sandhu knows the climate in the Sikh Community better than most people in Canada who operated within the community, as he had an opportunity to travel from coast to coast during those times.

- He headed the World Sikh Organization of Canada with over 21,000 individual members with 56 chapters in Canada. He also served as its International President.
- He has known the majority of the Canadian Sikh community to be peaceful, hard working and dedicated to the prosperity of Canada contrary to the picture painted by some witnesses. It does not tolerate violence and extremism, and most people would not knowingly harbor criminals.
- Mr. Sandhu has had the experience of being President of two Gurdwaras and knows first hand how they function and provide religious and spiritual service to their congregations. Contrary to some witnesses' comments, Gurdwaras are not used to funnel monies to terrorist organizations. They are charitable institutions that provide critical assistance to the underprivileged in Canadian society. Presently, for example, gurdwaras across Canada are participating in blood drives, and providing food and warm clothing to those less fortunate living in Canada's poorest neighbourhoods.
- Mr. Sandhu has had first hand experience of dealing with Punjabi media as well as the main stream media. He can speak to how a handful of individuals within the media have played a critical role in fomenting division and hatred both against the Sikh community, and also within the Sikh community, against voices of moderation.