



## Press Release

### **Sikh Passengers Shun San Francisco International Airport**

(Burlingame, CA) May 7, 2008 – The Sikh Coalition revealed this week that Sikh passengers are being targeted for secondary screenings at San Francisco International Airport (SFO). Consequently, many Bay Area Sikhs say they will avoid flying through SFO whenever possible.

The Sikh Coalition's TSA Report Card found that SFO was the “worst case scenario” for Sikh travelers. Sikhs, who wear turbans according to the mandates of their faith, are being pulled aside for secondary screening every time they depart on a flight from SFO. The Report Card reveals that 35% of all complaints about the TSA screening policy received by the Sikh Coalition from Sikhs across the country this quarter stem from SFO.

The result is religious profiling. “It is pretty clear to me as a Sikh that I am being subjected to unreasonable procedures that do not apply to other US citizens,” said Kuljot Singh, a Sikh passenger. Instead of being singled out every time they need to fly, Sikh travelers are choosing to fly through alternative airports in Oakland or San Jose.

In October 2007, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) implemented a policy giving screeners discretion to decide when to additionally search passengers with head coverings that could be deemed “bulky.” The move mirrored other emerging security policies that take a host of variable factors – including facial expressions and ticket status - into account when deciding when to subject a passenger to secondary screening.

SFO is the **only** airport that chose to interpret the revision as a mandatory turban screening policy, thus creating a disproportionate and unwarranted focus on Sikh passengers. Only a single Sikh passenger reported that he was not subject to additional screening of his turban when departing through SFO.

“The TSA policy being applied at SFO is not keeping any American safe,” said Amardeep Singh, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition. “Targeting all turban-wearing Sikhs is profiling – a strategy that has been proven to be ineffective for law enforcement. And singling out all Sikhs in such a public way sends the very harmful message to Americans that Sikhs are somehow suspect because of their religious garb.”

#### Background:

Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion, with approximately 21 million adherents worldwide. Under the principals of their faith, Sikhs are mandated to leave all hair on their bodies uncut, wrapping the hair on their heads underneath a turban.

Since 9/11, misperceptions about this appearance have led to hate attacks and discrimination against Sikhs across the country, by both public and private actors. The Sikh Coalition has

been working with the TSA on its turban screening policies since August 2007 to ensure that our country remains safe, while still protecting our citizens' civil rights.

For more information on Sikhs and Sikh practices, go to [www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org). To see a copy of the Sikh Coalition's TSA Report Card, go to <https://salsa.wiredforchange.com/o/1607/images/TSA%20Q1%20Report%20Card.pdf>.

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