



Press Release

Hudson County Prosecutor Refuses to Charge Attacker with a Bias Crime

(Hoboken, NJ) April 4, 2008 – The Sikh Coalition is dismayed by the Hudson County prosecutor's decision not to charge a January assault on Hansdip Singh as a bias crime. The Coalition learned yesterday that the prosecutor's office instead is charging Carrie Covello, who attempted to remove Mr. Singh's turban in public, with harassment, a non-bias-related charge.

“Hoboken is a great place to live, with great people.” said Amardeep Singh, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition. “The town has traditionally been a welcoming point for our nation's immigrants. But the many racist responses to this incident by commentators on Hoboken 411, and the prosecutor's decision not to charge Ms. Covello with a bias crime, send a disheartening message to all those who care about America. The Hudson County Prosecutor clearly had an opportunity to stand up for an inclusive Hoboken and simply failed. Clearly, we have a long road ahead to ensure that Hoboken and New Jersey are truly open to everyone.

The assault occurred on January 29, 2008. Hansdip Singh, a Sikh New Jersey resident, was standing in the Madison Grill in Hoboken when a woman behind him grabbed his turban and attempted to pry it from his head. She had almost succeeded by the time Mr. Singh turned around to confront her. When he did so, the woman remarked that she had a problem with "that stuff" on his head, and told him to "take it off."

The Sikh Coalition is deeply troubled by the Hudson County Prosecutor's suggestion that telling a Sikh to remove his turban and physically attempting to do so is not intimidating enough to rise to the level of a bias crime. The Coalition is concerned that the prosecutor's own lack of cultural understanding played into the decision not to prosecute this assault as a bias crime. Ms. Covello's actions directly targeted Mr. Singh's faith and his religious appearance. The prosecutor's decision effectively excuses those who target Sikhs' turbans for ridicule and aggression.

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.

In the years since 9/11, misperceptions about this appearance have led to hate attacks against Sikhs across the country and in Seattle. The Sikh Coalition has recorded over 500 incidents of bias against Sikhs on its website since 9/11.

For more information on Sikhs and Sikh practices, go to www.sikhcoalition.org.

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