Introducing a quick and easy way to report complaints of air travel discrimination in real time, right after the incident occurs.

INNOVATIVE MOBILE APP TO COMBAT TSA PROFILING TAKES FLIGHT

WASHINGTON DC (April 30, 2012) - The Sikh Coalition and other prominent national civil rights leaders will release a game-changing mobile application this morning that enables users to report instances of airport profiling in real time during a 10:00 a.m. EST launch event at the offices of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 1629 K Street, NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC.

For years, Sikh travelers have complained of discriminatory screening and pat downs at airport checkpoints across the United States. At some airports, the Sikh Coalition has found that Sikh travelers are subjected to secondary screening 100% of the time.

The Sikh Coalition created the application --- called “FlyRights” ---- to bridge the gap between Sikh, Muslim, South Asian, Latino, and other community concerns about airport profiling and official remedial action. Complaints filed through the innovative app will be reviewed as official complaints by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

“The TSA asserts it doesn’t profile. This application will allow us to better assess whether that’s true,” said Amardeep Singh, Director of Programs at the Sikh Coalition. “All travelers now have an easy way of speaking to their government on the issue of airport profiling.”

According to the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at DHS, only 11 official complaints of improper TSA screening were filed during the first two quarters of 2011. The Sikh Coalition believes the app will exponentially increase the number of complaints filed, providing transparency on the extent of profiling at US airports.

The news that the application was going be released today led to immediate support from allies outside of the impacted communities and on Capitol Hill. Senator Dick Durbin praised the app, saying: “The vast majority of law enforcement officers perform their jobs honorably and courageously. Unfortunately, the inappropriate actions of the few who engage in racial profiling create mistrust and suspicion that hurts all law enforcement officers. This app is an important new tool that allows passengers to fight profiling. I commend the Sikh Coalition and their partners in the civil rights community for this innovative approach to protecting the civil rights of innocent Americans.” Representative Judy Chu added: “Up until now, victims of racial profiling at our nation’s airports had no easy way to call attention to this unfortunate trend. The Sikh Coalition’s new app changes that. Travelers now have the power to fight racial profiling right at their fingertips.”

Wade Henderson, President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said: “Racial profiling is ineffective and wasteful law enforcement that regularly and unfairly deprives people of their freedom. This app will protect the innocent individuals who are most targeted and make air travel safer for all.”

FlyRights is available for both iPhones and Android phones. Both applications were created in consultation with advocacy organizations in the Black, Latino, South Asian, and civil liberties communities.

“For too long the TSA has kept a long leash on its screeners, telling them not to profile, but taking no effective measures to stop it,” Amardeep Singh continued. “Until that happens, we call on the public to hold the TSA accountable by downloading the Fly-Rights app and filing reports when appropriate.”

For more information, please visit: www.fly-rights.org
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BACKGROUNDER – RELEASE OF AIRPORT PROFILING MOBILE APP

• **What is the purpose of the App, FlyRights?** - The purpose of this phone application is to provide air travelers an easy way to submit a complaint of unfair treatment by airport screeners with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and/or the Sikh Coalition.

• **Why did you create FlyRights?**
  o For years, Sikh travelers have complained of discriminatory screening and pat downs at airport checkpoints across the United States. At some airports, the Sikh Coalition has found that 100% of Sikh travelers report they are subjected to unfair secondary screening.
  o According to the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at DHS, only 11 complaints of improper screening by the TSA were filed during the first two quarters of 2011. The Sikh Coalition believes that the app will significantly increase the number of complaints filed, providing transparency on the extent of profiling at the nation's airports.
  o We therefore created this application to bridge the gap between community frustration about airport profiling and official action. Complaints filed through the innovative app will be reviewed as official complaints by TSA and DHS.

• **On what phones will FlyRights work?** – IPhone and Android.

• **Who came up with this idea? Who did you work on it with?** – The idea for the app came from Sikh entrepreneurs who frequently travel and asked why there "isn’t an app for that" when it came to profiling. We then worked with civil rights groups in the Black, Latino, South Asian, and Muslim communities to develop the app, sharing screenshots and soliciting feedback. The NAACP, National Council for La Raza, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and South Asian Americans Leading Together, were among the groups consulted. We also shared screenshots and sought feedback from DHS.

• **Do you believe the TSA engages in unlawful profiling?** – The TSA says it does not profile. We believe this app will help us get closer to the truth on that question. Sikh, Muslim, and South Asian travelers do often believe they are being profiled.

• **What do you want from the TSA?** The TSA can’t have their cake and eat it too. The TSA tells its screeners not to profile, yet they have not adopted effective measures to guard against it. We want the TSA to implement better safeguards against profiling. In February 2012, the Sikh Coalition released an internal TSA memorandum obtained through a Freedom of Information Act Request in which a TSA consultant concluded the TSA could viably audit its own screening practices to guard against profiling. We want to get that memorandum off a dusty shelf and implemented on the ground.

• **Are Sikhs, Muslims, and South Asians the only groups concerned about TSA profiling?** In November 2011, a disturbing news report found that a group of TSA screeners called the “Mexicutioners” by their colleagues deliberately subjected Mexican air travelers to additional stops at Honolulu International Airport. The allegations followed a June 2011 report in the New Jersey Star-Ledger detailing how TSA officers deliberately subjected Mexican and Dominican travelers to extra scrutiny.
SIKH EXPERIENCES AT THE AIRPORT

Prabhjit Singh – Prabhjit Singh travels frequently for work. In 2007, he was one of 32 people who complained about TSA search procedures and was not happy with the response. On a trip from Baltimore to Alabama, he passed through a metal detector without a problem but was told he would be subjected to a mandatory pat-down of his turban. When he informed TSA security agents that his rights were being violated, they yelled at him and told him he would not fly. He was eventually able to fly that day but not without more yelling from agents.

Narinder Singh - Narinder Singh is the Chair of the Board of the Sikh Coalition. He was born and raised in the heartland of America, near Cincinnati, Ohio. He is a Wharton M.B.A., who co-founded a technology company in the Silicon Valley which now employs hundreds of Americans and was named a World Economic Forum Technology Pioneer for 2012. His wife is an assistant professor at Columbia University. Narinder is also a frequent air traveler, normally traveling on 100+ flights per year. By his estimate, he has been pulled aside for enhanced screening more than 95% of the time. In February 2010, Narinder was even told that he would have to remove his religiously-mandated turban for inspection if he wanted to travel out of Dallas Fort Worth Airport.

Gurinder Singh Ahluwalia – Gurinder Singh Ahluwalia travels by air three weeks each month as a part of his job as the CEO and President of a wealth management company that employs hundreds of people. He believes that while many TSA employees are cordial and friendly, the real problems are TSA policies which allow for extra scrutiny of Sikhs. He is also concerned with having his children seeing bias being hardwired into our society; specifically - why he is being subjected to extra scrutiny at the airport.
BIOS OF FLYRIGHTS LAUNCH EVENT SPEAKERS

Prabhjit Singh, Religious Profiling Victim – Prabhjit Singh travels frequently for work. On a trip from Baltimore to Alabama, he passed through a metal detector without a problem but was told he would be subjected to a mandatory pat-down of his turban. When he informed TSA security agents that his rights were being violated, they yelled at him and told him he would not fly. He was eventually able to fly that day but not without more yelling from agents.

Sapreet Kaur, Executive Director, The Sikh Coalition – Sapreet Kaur is the Executive Director of the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the United States, the Sikh Coalition, which has led the fight against TSA profiling of Sikhs since the TSA’s inception.

Amardeep Singh, Cofounder and Program Director, The Sikh Coalition – Amardeep Singh has been the leading voice on the issue of alleged TSA profiling of Sikhs. He has been quoted extensively on the issue in the media and testified before Congress on the issue in 2010: http://judiciary.house.gov/hearings/pdf/Singh100617.pdf.

Farhana Khera, Executive Director, Muslim Advocates – Farhana Khera is the first Executive Director of Muslim Advocates and the National Association of Muslim Lawyers. Prior to joining Muslim Advocates worked for six years directly for Senator Russell D. Feingold where she focused substantially on the Patriot Act and racial and religious profiling. She has also testified before Congress on the issue of racial profiling of the Muslim community and discrimination generally.

Priya Murthy, Policy Director, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) – Priya Murthy serves as SAALT’s Policy Director, where she monitors and analyzes legislative and administrative policies affecting the South Asian community, including policies that promote or allow racial and religious profiling.

Gadier Abbas, Staff Attorney, Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) – Gadier Abbas serves as a staff attorney at the Council on American Islamic Relations, where he has worked on cases involving surveillance and racial profiling throughout the country.
For more information, contact:
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QUOTATIONS

"It is the Sikh Coalition's intention to give our community the tools to defend their own rights. We’re happy to make this app free of charge to ensure that all --- Sikh or not --- have the ability to make their voice heard."
- Sapreet Kaur, Executive Director, The Sikh Coalition

“The TSA asserts it doesn’t profile. This application will allow us to better assess whether that’s true. Now, everyone has an easy, simple way of speaking to their government on the issue of airport profiling.”
- Amardeep Singh, Program Director, The Sikh Coalition

“For too long the TSA has kept a long leash on its screeners, telling them not to profile, but has taken no effective measures to stop it. Until that happens, we call on the public to hold the TSA accountable by downloading the FlyRights app and filing reports when appropriate.”
- Amardeep Singh, Program Director, The Sikh Coalition

“Racial profiling undermines the rule of law and strikes at the core of our nation’s commitment to equal protection for all.”
“The vast majority of law enforcement officers perform their jobs honorably and courageously, putting their lives at risk to protect the communities they serve. Unfortunately, the inappropriate actions of the few who engage in racial profiling create mistrust and suspicion that hurts all law enforcement officers. This app is an important new tool that allows passengers to fight profiling. I commend the Sikh Coalition and their partners in the civil rights community for this innovative approach to protecting the civil rights of innocent Americans.”
– Senator Richard Durbin

“Every time a TSA agent singles out a Sikh American for additional scrutiny at the airport based solely on their religious appearance, it reinforces unfair stereotypes. Up until now, victims of racial profiling at our nation’s airports had no easy way to report these instances or call attention to this unfortunate trend. The Sikh Coalition’s new app changes that. Travelers now have the power to fight racial profiling and discrimination right at their fingertips. I applaud the Coalition for their work in developing this app to ensure that travelers of all backgrounds are treated fairly every time they fly.”
– Rep. Judy Chu

“Racial profiling is ineffective and wasteful law enforcement that regularly and unfairly deprives people of their freedom. This app will protect the innocent individuals who are most targeted and make air travel safer for everyone. ”
– Wade Henderson, President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

“In the new technology era where many people carry smartphones, this App will allow members of our community to easily and efficiently report racial profiling in a timely fashion. We know that racial profiling at airports by TSA is happening across the country, it’s important that we will now be able to see the trends nationwide.”
- Nadia Tonova, Director, National Network for Arab American Communities
As profiling cases often go unreported, we applaud the Sikh Coalition for creating FlyRights. This tool will not only empower travelers and let them easily report discrimination from their smartphone, but will also provide invaluable data in real-time allowing us to understand the scope of racial and religious profiling at our airports.

– Farhana Khera, Executive Director, Muslim Advocates

“Over the past ten years, South Asians have endured discrimination resulting from government policies and practices in the contexts of airport screenings, immigration enforcement, and surveillance operations. Yet, government agencies, including the TSA, have constantly asserted that they do not engage in racial and religious profiling. The FlyRights app provides passengers with an invaluable tool to let TSA know how profiling is indeed a reality and help efforts calling for TSA to institute measures to stop such discrimination.”

- Deepa Iyer, Executive Director, South Asian Americans Leading Together

“Racial Profiling of Arab, Muslim and South Asian Americans is a pervasive problem—particularly for those travelling through airports and border entry points. The FlyRights app will give people the confidence that there is some significant action they can take immediately when they are profiled by TSA. This app will also help document abuses and hopefully lead to stronger protections to prevent racial profiling.”

- Margaret Huang, Executive Director, Rights Working Group

“With the FlyRights app, the Sikh Coalition is providing all Americans with a modern way to voice concerns over possible air travel discrimination.

“The ability of the individual to bring their issues directly to government is a core part of America and the FlyRights app keeps that tradition fully in the twenty-first century.”

- Corey Saylor, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), National Legislative Director

"By allowing travelers to report incidents as they happen, this app empowers the TSA to achieve new heights in social responsibility. FlyRights is a milestone in civil rights."

- Karan Gulati, Director of Iconify Creative (Developers of FlyRights)