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KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY

ESTABLISHED IN 1906

SIKH TEMPLE

8000 ROSS STREET, at MARINE DRIVE • VANCOUVER, B. C. V5X 4C5

TELEPHONE: 324-2010 or 322-5610



Re: 75 TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT

"A REPRESENTATION OF CANADA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY
OF EXCLUSION FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY"

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY:

Various Indo-Canadian
and Sikh societies
across Canada and U.S.A.

SPECIAL ADVISOR:

Prof. Hugh Johnston
Simon Fraser University

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June 16, 1989

Premier Bill Van Der Zalm,
Premier of British Columbia,
Legislative Building,
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

Dear Premier Vander Zalm,

Our society along with the rest of the Sikh community across Canada are deeply concerned and shocked at the insensitivity your Government has shown in the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT.

We had made a request to you and the Government of British Columbia in writing on March 23, 1989 to unveil a monument commemorating this reprehensible incident. This request was followed by a meeting with representatives of different Sikh societies on your visit to Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Surrey on April 26, 1989. You assured them at that time that you will certainly have the Government commemorate the incident. We subsequently followed this meeting with another letter on April 26, 1989 requesting three items:

- 1) Proclaim July 23, 1989 to be KOMAGATA MARU Day (copy of proclamation was attached).
- 2) The Province of British Columbia unveil a permanent monument on this historic day.
- 3) You attend the historical gathering on July 23, at Pier A (west of Canada Place) as an honoured guest.

After reading the debates of the Legislative Assembly of May 23, 1989 I was shocked at Hon Mr. Reid's response to Mr. Sihota's simple question on the commemorative recognition of the KOMAGATA MARU Incident. We followed this unfair response by the Government with a letter to Hon. Bill Reid on May 25, 1989. We have yet to receive a reply from him.

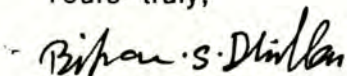
Our pride and historical heritage in British Columbia was hurt even more when after the debate of the Legislative Assembly of June 13, 1989 you accused Mr. Sihota for inciting tensions in B.C.'s Sikh community. On the contrary, we have been asking your Government to commemorate this Dark event in Canadian history in a positive manner for the last three months, but your refusal is inciting tensions. Your government's refusal to the requests made by various Indo-Canadian organizations to place a commemorative plaque definitely shows your intentions. Our society which has been in existence since 1906 and with a membership of over 20,000 had made three simple requests as outlined above. But your Government overlooked our requests and decided to grant the Komagata Maru Foundation of Canada "a fly by night" organization which has a membership of only a handful of people (and definitely does NOT represent the Indo-Canadian community) the task of preparing a video.

The KOMAGATA MARU incident of 1914 finds injustices done by the then Dominion of Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and the City of Vancouver. There is written documentation in the archives substantiating these facts. The Government of Canada and the City of Vancouver have agreed to placing and funding a commemorative plaque in principle in Vancouver. We urge you to reconsider your stand and join the other levels of Government in commemorating the tragic incident.

The Sikhs of British Columbia have contributed positively to this province, and Canada for over 90 years. Our request is simply to commemorate our roots and existence in Canada. Our society being the first Indo-Canadian society in Canada has been given the unique honour to coordinate the commemoration of the KOMAGATA MARU incident by over 100 Sikh societies across Canada. We have taken positive steps as donations will be made to Food Banks across Canada during the week of July 9-16, 1989 in recognition of the starvation and the humiliation that the passengers had to go through in Vancouver.

As a goodwill gesture we feel that it is imperative that you meet our three requests outlined above. Please respond to our genuine requests at your earliest as our advertising deadline is 10 days.

Yours truly,



Bikar Singh Dhillon,
President

C.C. Hon. Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. John Fraser, Speaker, House of Commons
Hon. Gerry Weiner, Minister of Multiculturalism
Hon Bill Reid, Minister of Tourism
Hon Rita Johnson, Cabinet Minister
Mr. Moe Sihota, M.L.A. Esquimalt-Port Renfrew
President, Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford
President, Khalsa Diwan Society, New Westminster
President, Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Surrey
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