

NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

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Civil Rights Groups Launch Study of Travellers Caught in the Web of Government Watchlists

On the first anniversary of the Canadian no-fly list coming into effect, the B.C. Civil Liberties Association joins a coalition of organizations launching an innovative research project to document the impact on citizens' rights of the no-fly list and other watchlists.

Stories have surfaced about how the growing surveillance of travellers has violated the privacy and mobility rights of Canadians. This week, Indo-Canadian author and playwright Jaspreet Singh cancelled scheduled appearances at two major cultural events after failing to get assurances from Air Canada that he would not be subjected to the intense security checks that have marred his previous flights this year.

BCCLA Policy Director, Micheal Vonn: "Mr. Singh's story is a sadly familiar one and yet we know that publicized stories are just the tip of the iceberg. Many people have not come forward and this research is urgently needed to demonstrate what a devastating impact these policies are having for little or no security benefit."

The project is headed by the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group in partnership with the BCCLA, CUPE, Polaris Institute, the Canadian Labour Congress and La Ligue Des Doits et Liberties. The research documents stories from travellers about their encounters with airlines, transport and border officials in Canada and the U.S. People can report their experiences at the research website www.travelwatchlist.ca or contact the researchers by a toll-free number or by mail. The researchers will not release or publish any personal information without prior consent.

Traveller Surveillance Facts:

- Despite the introduction of the Canadian no-fly list, airlines continue to use the U.S. no-fly list even when travelers are flying domestically within Canada;
- A significant number of people who are being detained at the border are from racialized communities, peace activists or have a history of labour activism;
- Individuals have little recourse if they are mistakenly targeted. Senator Colin Kenny, who Chairs the National Security and Defence Committee, asked for the intervention of the Transport Minister regarding his son Robert, who is an attorney, who has had problems flying in Canada and the U.S. for the past five years and his youngest son, James, who is also on some sort of airline watchlist;
- In the first year of the Canadian no-fly list, Transport Canada reported approximately 100 cases of false positives based on a list said to contain between 500 – 3,000 names;
- According to the American Civil Liberties Union, U.S. watchlists include over a million names;
- In the U.S., one airline reports 9,000 false positive watchlist identifications every day;
- There is no empirical evidence that no-fly lists increase safety and security.