

Sikh Council of Australia Inc

Inc No: INC9877869

Uniting Sikhs in Australia...
www.sikhcouncil.org.au



Friday, 16 December 2005

Mr. Stepan Kerkyasharian AM
Chairperson Community Relation Commission,
P.O.Box A2618
Sydney South NSW 1235
Fax: 82556868

Dear Mr. Kerkyasharian,

REF: Wearing of "Kirpan" an article of the Sikh faith by the Sikh employees of the Department of Corrective Services.

It appears that once again the Sikhs are at the receiving end, a few weeks ago it was the racially and culturally motivated attacks by the religious zealot thugs and now it is the Commissioner of the Department of Corrective Services.

Over the past few weeks I have been inundated with the telephone calls and e-mails from the members of the Sikh community, working in the corrective services, expressing their concerns and fear of keeping their identity while at work, because of the unilateral changes the department of corrective services has made to their "Operations Procedures Manuel", which make it illegal for a Sikh employee of the Corrective Services to carry a symbolic **metallic Kirpan**, which they are allowed to wear under the Amendment of Summary Offences Act.

The departmental heads (Governors) of the corrective services have issued directives to all the officers for the strict enforcement of these changes and the Sikh employees are not allowed to resume their duties and sent home, unless they conform to the changes made to the OPM. For fear of loosing their jobs while conforming to their religious obligations they are living under enormous stress and some, am told, have gone on stress leaves. What the department has proposed and is enforcing that the Sikhs who want to be continually employed by the corrective services can only wear a *two centimetres long plastic replica* of the of "Kirpan" (Ref: Operations Procedures Manual Section 22.16 Officer carrying knives). It is worth noting that this Section contradicts Section 22.1 of the OPM, which states:

"Officer Carrying Knives: There can be emergency situations, (e.g attempted suicide by hanging) which justify an officer carrying a knife....."

Sikh Council is concerned about the enforcement of this, what the Council views as an unlawful demand, and strongly opposed to such an unacceptable and ridiculous suggestion, by the department of corrective services, which tantamount to denying the Sikhs of their basic right to freely practice their religion the way they want. Today it is the Kirpan issue, tomorrow it will be their turban and the next will be their outward appearance, such religious and culturally stimulated discriminations must be stopped.

I, on behalf of the Sikh Council Of Australia, would request you to please take up this matter with the Department Of Corrective Services so that the Sikh employees can do their normal duties, while conforming to their religious requirements, without fear of being subjected to indirect religious harassment.

Submitted for your immediate action.

Yours sincerely,

Bawa Singh Jagdev
Secretary
Sikh Council of Australia Inc
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Encl: Copy of the Memo, Changes to the Operations Procedures Manual