

PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM THE AIR INDIA 182 VICTIMS FAMILIES ASSOCIATION

1. In response to today's court decision on the Air India Flight 182 tragedy off the coast of Ireland on June 23, 1985, we the families of those murdered on that day wish to make the following statement.

2. The enormity of this tragedy can not be overstated. The bombing killed 329 innocent persons, 22 crew members and 307 passengers, in addition to 2 people working at the Narita airport when a second related bomb exploded. This is an undeniable fact. The majority were Canadian citizens, but there were also Americans and Indians representing almost all religions.

3. This was the worst case of mass murder in Canadian history and the worst terrorist disaster involving a plane before the 9/11. Over 80 victims were children below the age of 12. About twenty complete families (husband, wife, and all children) were exterminated. Two-dozen persons were left alone having lost their spouse and all children. Six parents lost all their children.

4. This is a national story with national impact. More importantly this is a personal story with personal impact on so many people. A personal impact that is real, that is painful, that is permanent. We were sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers when our families went to India to visit other loved ones. Through no fault of their own in traveling to India and no fault of ours, our loved ones never came home. Our loved ones left us forever and it was never their intention to do so.

5. This statement will not comment on the verdict of the court or the pain suffered by the families of the victims of this tragedy. The families of the victims of Air India 182 tragedy are demanding a public inquiry into all matters related to this disaster. We are doing this in the interest of protecting innocent Canadians from a recurrence of similar terrorism related tragedies.

6. Some of us were children when our families were murdered. The common bond we all share as victims of this heinous crime is the incalculable pain and suffering it has caused. A pain we would not wish to befall any Canadian – not even the perpetrators of this crime.

With the passage of time there are now two crimes we must contend with – the murder of 329 innocent persons and the time it has taken to answer the questions how and why.

7. The Westray Mine Disaster, Walkerton, Tainted Blood, are all horrendous events that required a thorough review, as a result of the system failing those that it was set up to protect. There is a basic principle why public inquiries are called and the Air India bombing meets that the requirements of this principle:

(a) This was the worst case of mass murder in Canada.

(b) This tragedy killed a large number of Canadians and involved a terrorist conspiracy conceived and executed in Canada.

(c) As noted in the trial and in the media there have been numerous reports of the failure of the system before and after the tragedy: surveillance on suspects was suspended a few days before the tragedy; there were prior warnings to authorities from various sources from within and outside Canada; unaccompanied baggage carrying the bombs was processed; screening systems were reportedly not functioning; there was a breakdown in co-operation/communication between CSIS and RCMP; and there was destruction of evidence.

(d) There is always a risk of future recurrence of a similar tragedy with calamitous results - it's an unfortunate part of the human condition. But, more can and needs to be done to correct the failures of the system. News related to terrorism is reported in papers almost every day. The potential victims would be innocent Canadians irrespective of race, colour, or creed.

8. The criminal trial of the two accused in the case has only dealt with matters related directly to the guilt or innocence of the two accused. Most of the failures of the systems were not even touched in the criminal trial. Only a public inquiry can investigate the failures of the system and suggest required effective remedies in order to prevent recurrence of similar incidents in future.

9. In the past, the reasons given by the Government for not holding a public inquiry were the civil suit involving claims by the families and/or the ongoing criminal investigation. None of these reasons exists today.

10. Let it be clear that the loss of our family members is irreversible. What is reversible is the possible recurrence of such tragedies. For this to be accomplished a public inquiry should be convened to elucidate out various acts of omissions and the failures of the system, which contributed to this tragedy. Only then can remedies be suggested and implemented, and the recurrence of such tragedies be prevented.

11. Let us make this clear as to what happened here. This was not an aviation accident, this was not an in-flight incident. This was murder, pure and simple. Murder. Murder in any system of justice demands: justice.

12. If the murder of 329 people, including over 200 real Canadian men, real Canadian women and real Canadian children – everyone of them a real loving individual, as a result of failures in the system does not deserve a public inquiry, then what does?

Contact: Dr. Bal Gupta, 416-621-6035

Note: On March 16th and 17th, please contact at the Sutton Place Hotel