

Advertisement

CTVNEWS

Activist group cries foul on no-fly list anniversary

The Canadian Press

Published Thursday, June 19, 2008 7:26AM EDT

Last Updated Friday, May 18, 2012 8:28PM EDT

SHARE: [X Post](#) [Reddit](#) [Share 0](#)

VANCOUVER - Civil rights groups are calling on Canadians to share their stories of racial profiling, informer recruitment and other trials of travelling under heightened security rules.

A coalition of groups marked the first anniversary of the so-called no-fly list's introduction in Canada by announcing a study into the impact of the lists in Canada and the U.S.

The groups condemned the watch list Wednesday, saying too many innocent travellers are needlessly caught on the lists.

"The model of militarizing travel, setting up check points at airports and creating secret watch lists is clearly having a disastrous impact on privacy, mobility, equality and security rights of Canadians," Michael Vonn, of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, said at a news

conference in Vancouver.

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group held a concurrent news conference in Ottawa.

Canada first developed its list in June 2007.

But the civil rights coalition says airlines and officials continue to use American versions - even when individuals are travelling within Canada - thus increasing the likelihood of mistaken identity.

Researchers Rahat Kurd and Alnoor Gova said they've already spoken to more than three dozen people who told them racial profiling takes place.

Kurd said participants felt "that Canada state officials do target Muslim individuals with greater scrutiny and suspicion because of their religious identity."

While many were questioned while travelling, Kurd said they also heard stories of CSIS agents and RCMP officers visiting homes to ask about religious activities.

And Kurd said the Mounties Integrated National Security Enforcement Team is trying to recruit informants within the Muslim community.

She said the police actions have created a culture of fear within the community.

Gova recounted the story of a 62-year-old Iranian-born Canadian woman who told him that she was on a bus tour when she refused to give her fingerprints to a U.S. border guard.

The woman said that none of the Caucasians or Indians on her bus tour were fingerprinted before her and she had done nothing wrong.

"That's when I felt I had my Rosa Parks moment," he said she told him, citing the woman who emboldened the U.S. civil rights movement by refusing to obey the bus driver and move to the rear of the bus, which was reserved for blacks.

"I was not moving to the back of the bus," they said the unnamed woman told them during their research for the Maru Society - an advocacy group for migrants - with a grant from the Faculty of Law Foundation at the University of British Columbia.

Transport Canada spokeswoman Lucie Vignola said the passenger protection program was created to identify people who pose an immediate threat.

"It's important to note that Canadians have accepted this new approach because it helps protect them against criminals and alleged terrorists," Vignola said in an e-mail.

She added there are safeguards in the Canadian list, such as birth date, to protect against false matches.

Canadian engineer Maher Arar was on a U.S. watch list when he was stopped while travelling and, instead of being sent back to Canada, was transferred to Syria where he was tortured.

The chief of internal investigations at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has recently

reopened the investigation that concluded the American government did no wrong when it sent Arar to Syria.

Canada paid Arar \$10.5 million in compensation after he was cleared of any terror links.

"People have very little recourse when they find themselves mistakenly targeted," Vonn said.

The coalition, which includes CUPE and the Canadian Labour Congress, as well as the civil liberties groups, plans to use the information it gathers to lobby the government for legislative change.

"Canada implemented its own no-fly list without one shred of evidence that such measures increase aviation safety and security and with a mountain of evidence that the U.S. no-fly list is an unmitigated fiasco," Vonn said.

She said some American airlines are getting thousands of false positives daily when they punch in travellers names.

Richard Rosenberg, of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, said no one knows how their name gets on the lists. Governments won't reveal the criteria, saying terrorists might figure out how to keep their names off the list.

And, he said, "there's no way of knowing whether any of these measures have any real effect in deterring terrorism."