

TSA Changes Head Covering Screening Procedure in Response to Concerns of Religious Profiling

New procedure sensitive to Sikh turban and other religious head coverings

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This afternoon the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced a new security screening policy that will go into effect at U.S. airports on October 27 and apply to all religious head coverings. The change is a direct result of collaboration between TSA, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) and other Sikh organizations in response to the concerns of the Sikh American community over a procedure implemented on August 4, 2007.

The August 2007 procedure disproportionately targeted Sikhs for secondary screening due to their turban, an article of faith, like the Jewish *kippah* (yarmulke) and Muslim *hijab*. The turban is an integral part of the Sikh faith and identity, and removal of the turban in public is akin to a strip search. The procedure resulted in Sikh travelers being forced to undergo an invasive pat-down or removal of the turban.

The turban was the only religious article listed as potentially requiring additional screening. Furthermore, the procedure may have resulted in a misallocation of national security resources due to the heightened focus on Sikh passengers solely because of their religious practice of wearing a turban.

'The new policy is encouraging and addresses most of the concerns of the Sikh American community,' said Kavneet Singh, SALDEF's Managing Director. 'Our collaboration with TSA has resulted in a solution that strengthens TSA's ability to protect our nation's airports, while also respecting the civil liberties of all travelers of faith. We will continue to work closely with TSA to ensure that the implementation of the new procedure does not result in the inappropriate profiling of Sikhs and other travelers of faith.'

Under the new procedure, a Sikh traveler's turban will be accommodated during the screening process by providing additional options to satisfy the security requirements. According to TSA, the revised procedure states:

'TSA will now include the screening procedures for headwear within the overall category of bulky clothing and will not call it out as a separate category. Removal of all headwear is recommended but the rules accommodate those with religious, medical, or other reasons for whom removing items is not comfortable. Transportation security officers have several options for screening passengers who choose not to remove bulky clothing, including headwear.'

Additionally, all 43,000 TSA screeners will undergo Sikh cultural awareness training before the Thanksgiving holiday travel season. The trainings will include two tools developed by SALDEF in collaboration with the US Department of Justice:

A training video: *On Common Ground: Sikh American Cultural Awareness Training for Law Enforcement* [[watch video](#)]; and A poster called, *Common Sikh American Head Coverings* [[view poster](#)], that TSA is distributing to all 450 airports across the country.

SALDEF thanks TSA Administrator Kip Hawley for his leadership along with officials at TSA and DHS for their collaborative efforts in finding a solution that balances both national security and protects the rights of all travelers going through America's airports.

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About SALDEF

Founded in 1996, SALDEF is the largest and oldest Sikh American civil rights and educational organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the civil rights of Sikh Americans through legal aid, advocacy and educational outreach. SALDEF's mission is to create a fostering environment in the United States for future generations of Sikh Americans.

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