

Statement of Mary Jo Leddy

May 11, 2000

Mary Jo Leddy, Order of Canada and author of *At the Border Called Hope: Where Refugees Are Neighbours*, filed the formal complaints on behalf of Sami and Suleyman. She is the director of Romero House for Refugees in Toronto. She is not at the news conference because she is on a writing sabbatical. Instead she has prepared this statement. Instead, June Callwood has agreed to represent her statement.

I have known Sami Durgun and Suleyman Goven for almost eight years. During that time our lives have become intertwined and have been marked by their struggle to find safety in Canada.

I was a witness at the security interviews for both of these men. When I went with Suleyman, the CSIS officers obviously did not know who I was. They interrogated him for seven hours and right in front of me told him that things would go easy for him if he informed on other Kurds. He refused and things have not gone easy for him.

The CSIS officers had a very big carrot to hold in front of him. Until a refugee becomes a landed immigrant he cannot enroll in most educational / training programs, many meaningful jobs are closed to him and he cannot sponsor family members.

I took notes throughout this interrogation and subsequently published them in *At the Border Called Hope* (HarperCollins 1997).

When I went with Sami the CSIS officer made every effort to keep me out in spite of the fact that Sami had a right to have someone with him. I literally had to put my foot in the door to get in. The officer was a little less direct with Sami but the message was the same.

Sami said he would speak about himself but not about anyone else. Because he did not inform he has been living in limbo for years.

I understand Sami and Suleyman's reluctance to speak about other Kurds from Turkey. It is not because they know some dark and dangerous secret but rather because they have been shaped by the history of the oppression of their people. Turkey has succeeded in ruling the Kurds because it has been able to get Kurds to

turn on each other and inform. For Sami and Suleyman informing is a doubly odious act.

When I witnessed these interrogations, I wondered if I was in Canada or in some regime of terror. I thought about all the refugees who must go into a small room in which a CSIS agent wields the enormous power to decide their future and their fate. It is a process which leaves the refugee completely vulnerable and powerless.

Sami and Suleyman have lived in limbo for years. Suleyman has been continually harassed, his friends called in, his personal momentos stolen. Sami has lost job offers, affordable housing and his certificate in Business Logistics. They arrived in Canada as young men and now they are old. They have been unable to get married because they could not ask someone to join them in limbo.

They would have remained in limbo if they had kept quiet, done nothing. And they knew it would take a long time to get a measure of justice. I urged them to trust in the remedies that the Security and Intelligence Review Committee offered and I initiated the complaint against CSIS based on what I had witnessed.

Making this complaint was a great act of courage on the part of these two men. They had reason to fear reprisals, a further prolongation of their landing process. They were up against a very powerful and secretive institution which could invoke “national security” at every turn. They drew strength from the conviction of their innocence.

The SIRC proceedings took over five weeks in the fall and winter of 1998 and I went to every session with Sami and Suleyman. The chair of the proceedings was fair to all sides, the SIRC lawyers were very competent as were the lawyers for CSIS; and the counsel for the two Kurds (Sharryn Aiken and Barbara Jackman) went more than the extra mile on their behalf.

As the hearing wore on I became appalled by the ineptness of the CSIS agents and by their imperative need to cover this ineptness. It was depressing to realize that the lives of these two men and the security of our nation rests in the hands of such as these.

I realized that it is people such as these who have the enormous power of deciding who could be labeled a “terrorist” or a “member” of a terrorist group because there is no legislated definition of these terms. I saw the term being used so loosely that even I could fit into it for simply surfing the web to find out more about Kurds in Turkey.

For the sake of weeding out the few real terrorists in this country, a whole field of innocent people is being mowed down and the tractors are out of control.

I was shocked to see the extent to which CSIS agents would go to cover their tracks. At one point they introduced a document which the chair quickly ruled was a “forgery.” A document had been retrofitted to suit their story that refugee interviews are not interrogations that go on for hours.

During these hearings I was disturbed by the ways in which the treatment of Kurds from Turkey differed from the way in which Kurds from Iran and Iraq were treated as heroic resisters. It became clear to me that this had everything to do with Canada’s foreign interests as an ally of Turkey, with vested interests in military sales and the sale of Candu reactors to that country.

I must confess that it has not been easy for me to stand with and stand for two men who have been so easily called “terrorists.” I have been active, in the past, in efforts to bring Nazi war criminals to trial and I do not want to lend credence to anyone who would threaten the lives of innocent people. The shadowy world of secret agents is not one in which I am comfortable.

Yet, I now know it exists and every Canadian must demand that the actions done in darkness must be accounted for at least somewhere. CSIS agents do have a duty to pursue the guilty but they must not be allowed to punish the innocent. We pretend this world does not exist only at our peril.

I stood with Sami during his long and courageous vigil when he was outside in the cold for more than 40 days and nights. I went with him and Suleyman to meet with Parliamentarians in Ottawa. Why? Because I know them, I have seen them dance, listened to their jokes, watched them play with the children at our summer camp – and I have listened to them in their darkest moments. They are decent and delightful people and they deserve much better than they have experienced here.

The SIRC report completely exonerates these two men and severely criticizes CSIS for the way in which they have been treated. There are important recommendations which will make CSIS a better agency for dealing with real terrorists in this country. The SIRC report also recommends, without qualification, that they be landed. Any further delay in their landing process would be justice denied.

It is essential that the recommendations of this report be implemented. For every Sami and Suleyman who come forward, there are many others who remain terrorized, silenced by the threats of CSIS.

The Director of CSIS has been publicly quoted as saying that CSIS no longer asks refugees to inform. This is a lie. As recently as December of this year, three more Kurds from Turkey were terrorized during their security interviews and asked for information about Suleyman Goven in exchange for a recommendation for landing.

Refugees who have fled one regime of terror should not be subjected to a gentler but not kinder version of terror here.