

# **Statement of Suleyman Goven**

**May 11, 2000**

Dear ladies and gentlemen, members of the press,

My name is Suleyman Goven. I am an Alevi Kurd from Dersim (part of Turkish Kurdistan), where my ancestors and over 70,000 Alevi Kurds were massacred by the Turkish regime in 1938. Because of my nationality and faith, and being a local union leader, I was persecuted, imprisoned and tortured by the Turkish police after the September 12th, 1980 military coup. I still have two black toes as a result of the torture.

I left Turkey 16 December 1990 on a train. I had to leave a job I loved, a job as a mechanical engineer for the Turkish National Railways. I travelled across Europe and ended up in Ireland.

My journey to hope would not have come to the end that it has if I had not met a nice Canadian in Ireland in 1991. The person I met told me that Canada was a great place to live in so I came here to make a refugee claim. I was granted Convention refugee status in March 1993.

When I arrived in Canada in April 1991, I had no place to go; no place to sleep. One year after my arrival some of my friends and I established the Toronto Kurdish Community & Information Centre in order to help desperate and vulnerable newcomers to Canada in the same situation we were in a year before. When I first got to Canada, I found peace, physical protection, and hope, but that all changed dramatically in 1994 after I was interrogated by CSIS (the Canadian Security Intelligence Service) because they misinterpreted what, on my part, were law-abiding activities and the legitimate effort to build a place for the Kurdish community to meet.

Since then harassment, intimidation and threats have become part of my daily life. For example CSIS bugged my phone, took pictures of me, and followed me around. CSIS also forged a Call-In notice in my refugee file: In the hearings, the Chair of the SIRC tribunal determined that the original was a forgery. Other things that happened were: In 1996, some belongings were stolen from my home and, just before I gave testimony before SIRC, my briefcase was stolen. It was also common practice for CSIS to question Kurds and even some Turks about me.

During the interview I had with CSIS in 1994 – which I call an interrogation because it lasted seven hours – I was not given the opportunity to eat and I was under huge psychological pressure. At the end of the “interrogation,” I told my

CSIS interrogators that there was no difference between CSIS and the Turkish police except where physical torture was concerned. During my interrogation I was threatened and asked to be an informer in exchange for landing papers. A prominent Canadian citizen, Mary Jo Leddy, was present during the session. She described the interrogation in her book: *At the Border called Hope*.

CSIS's attempts to incriminate me have continued up to now – even after the SIRC report was finished. I would like to give an example how: A Kurdish refugee claimant arrived from Turkey just recently. CSIS called him up and scheduled an interview. During the interview, they questioned the newcomer about me for half an hour, even though my only involvement with him was to fill out his refugee claim form. This is one way that CSIS continues to terrorize refugees who were terrorized in their home countries, and to prey on scared and vulnerable people. This lunacy must stop.

In 1998 SIRC published an annual report calling for CSIS to stop demanding that people provide information about others in their community. But that didn't stop CSIS. Under the pretext of maintaining Canada's security, CSIS acts with impunity. This is in spite of a recent article in the *Globe and Mail* that suggests that CSIS's capability to protect Canada is in question because of leaks to the press. In fact, CSIS has failed in many cases. The Service, under the direction of Ward Elcock, had to comment on a petition signed by 14 Kurds which stated that they had been asked to become informants in exchange for landed status, he said that he was sure that it was not CSIS' practice to ask refugee claimants to become informants. Based on the SIRC report issued on April 7th, 2000, with regard to this practice, one must conclude that Mr. Elcock is wrong: The practice occurs. As a result, the best thing for Mr. Elcock is to resign.

I did not bring any domestic conflict to Canada when I came. But trade relations between Turkey and Canada impact on our lives: CSIS is an instrument of international trade agreements. The Canadian government should make an apology because of Immigration and CSIS's wrongdoings. Based on this situation, the Canadian government should clarify their intent with regard to business relations with the Turkish government, on the one hand, and oppressing dissident voices and refugee claimants on the other. People must recognize that refugee rights are human rights, especially if CSIS is violating human right in Canada for the sake of harmonizing trade relations. Common belief holds that Canada is a neutral country and that it is one of the best countries in the world in which to live; however, in reality, human rights abuses do occur, abuses which could mar Canada's prestige at home and abroad.

Current practices of Canada Immigration and CSIS have a huge effect on our lives. Being in limbo is tantamount to having the Sword of Damocles over your life. This

bad economic and social policy turns us into second class citizens compared to other Canadians who can enjoy basic human rights. I would like to give some examples. First, Ali Vural and his wife, Nazli Vural, sitting among you in the audience now, arrived in Canada eight years ago. At that time, they were obliged to leave their two-year-old son behind them in Turkey. He is now 10 years old and does not even recognize his parents. This is a source of constant suffering and agony for Ali and Nazli. Second, because of this limbo-like situation, at least 20 Kurds have not received their landed papers. CSIS recently called seven Kurds for interviews who were not active in the Kurdish Centre and did not participate in any demonstrations in Canada. If you wish, their names can be provided.

To me, CSIS is an inept organization because they rely extensively on informers to gather their information, and the information they gather is not reliable at that. There is no accountability. Furthermore, they pay money for the information they get. This is discussed in the SIRC report. I consider this to be a shameful business based on the agony and suffering of others: Shame on CSIS; shame also on the informers who cashed in on me and others, and who did business based on blood money. CSIS has dirty hands because they use human resources as a source of information and a shield. This same policy of pitting Kurd against Kurd has been used by the Turkish government for many years, but there it is called the Village Guard system.

I was persecuted and tortured by the Turkish government because I was Kurdish and a trade unionist. That's why I came to Canada to seek this country's protection nine years ago. However, like many other Kurdish refugees and others, the harassment and psychological torture has continued here, this time not by the Turkish police but by CSIS. Because of CSIS I am suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

I call on everyone to put pressure on the government to right CSIS and Canada Immigration's wrongdoings. I entreat you to do so on behalf of peace, human rights, and justice. We must all learn how to leave with our new neighbours; namely, refugees.