

## Canada/Alberta

# Turban policy upheld after retired Mounties get their half-day in court

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Sikhs and civil liberties advocates claimed victory Wednesday after the Federal Court of Appeal upheld the rights of Mounties to wear turbans while on duty.

"It affirms that this country has room for people of every ethnic group," said Vancouver's Pal-binder Shergill, legal counsel for the World Sikh Organization. "It's one more step toward attaining an

egalitarian society."

Calgary lawyer Brian Edy, counsel for the Alberta Civil Liberties Association, concurred. "We're very pleased with the result. The decision is a strong precedent which supports accommodation of Canadians of different religious backgrounds in the employment sector."

"But it's not just a Sikh case dealing with Sikh religion rights. It also applies to the Jewish or native spirituality, for examples."

The triumvirate of Chief Justice

Julius Isaac, and Justices James Hugesen and Allen Linden was unanimous in the decision, which upheld the Federal Court decision last July 8 of Justice Barbara Reed.

They dismissed the constitutional appeal after hearing more than four hours of argument by Ottawa lawyer Mark Edwards, who represents a group of retired Mounties based in Lethbridge. The group has spent more than \$200,000 and gathered more than 200,000 signatures on a petition

fighting former Commissioner Norman Inkster's 1988 ruling to allow officers to wear religious symbols as part of their Royal Canadian Mounted Police uniform.

Edwards had told court that it didn't make any difference whether an RCMP officer orally proclaimed his religious views or visually displayed them by wearing the turban; either way could cause someone to perceive a bias that destroyed the impartiality of the national police force.

"We are satisfied the learned trial judge (Reed) arrived at the proper decision," Linden said in announcing the decision Wednesday. "It (wearing turbans on duty) is not an attempt to weaken, but to strengthen our national police force."

"It reflects the new multicultural status of Canada."

The clearly-disappointed retired Mounties are not expected to take the case to the Supreme Court of Canada after its second major defeat on the issue.

"When there is a unanimous decision, I don't think the appeal court would give you leave (to go to the Supreme Court)," said Bernie Pelot of Ottawa, who retired in 1967 after a 20-year RCMP career.

"But this is a public interest case and we'll have to see what the reaction of the public is."

"I'm disappointed, mostly because I was also hoping for some kind of clear-cut decision on segregation of church and state. We didn't get that."