

KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Statement of Orientation and Objectives

The Preamble:

The 1914 incident of the Komagata Maru ship is one of the most tragic and shameful events in Canadian history. Obsessed with racial bigotry, determined to keep Canada all white, the then rulers of the country flouted every norm of social justice and kept the ship-load of immigrants from British India from landing. For full two months the ship stood in the Burrard Inlet, its hundreds of passengers quickly running out of drinking water and food supplies. Komagata Maru was finally pushed out of the Vancouver shores with the powerful guns of the Canadian Navy pointed at it.

For all those people living today in Canada whose roots go back to the Indian Sub-continent, the Komagata Maru episode is of profound historical significance. The three hundred and seventy six Hindu, Muslim and Sikh men and women who came on that ship were among the pioneers who had laid the solid foundation of our people's struggles in Canada. They suffered much hardship. They suffered hunger and thirst. They suffered humiliation of being turned back from these shores. Many were killed by the British police on reaching India back; many were incarcerated. But through all this they symbolized unity, perseverance, determination, and a daring to struggle for one's rights. These ancestors from our common land had come here to challenge not only the racist policies of the Canadian State but also the whole British empire.

The ship of our ancestors was turned back, but it could not be kept away. Seventy-five years later we are here; thousand times stronger. Through long years of hard work and determination, and living under severe discriminatory and inhospitable conditions, our community has made a place for itself in this land. We are a strong, visible, and viable community today. We are workers, doctors, teachers, traders, lawyers, engineers, artists, industrialists, investors, politicians. Through our labour and skills we have contributed to the enrichment of Canada. We are not confined today to only the western shores; we are all over - in every province, city and town.

And we are diverse. Among us are those who have lived in Canada for many generations, and those who came only recently. We are Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Zoroastrians. We are Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, Marathi, Haryanavis, Bihari, Tamil, and more. We came from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, Fiji, Carribean, Europe, Japan. And we are organized in a variety of linguistic, religious, cultural and other groups.

But it does not matter where we come from, what language we speak, and what religion we practice. Despite this rich diversity, we all share a common ancestry. KOMAGATA MARU is a common heritage for all of us. It symbolizes the unity our community has been capable of : the grave need for supporting the passengers on the ship united every segment of our local community under one banner, and further united us with all Canadians of goodwill who came forward in support of our rights. Today, when we commemorate the 75th anniversary of this incident, once again the whole community with all its diversity is moving toward the broadest possible unity.

The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY is formed by the joining together of a large number of community based organizations representing the vast cultural, linguistic and religious diversity among the people whose roots go back to the Indian sub-continent.

[The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY is registered under the Society's Act of British Columbia, and will seek the status of a non-profit, tax-exempt organization.]

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The Objectives:

The objectives of the KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY are:

- (1) To commemorate the shameful and tragic event of the Komagata Maru ship in the Canadian history, to keep its memory alive, and to transmit it to future generations.
- (2) To honour the suffering, sacrifices and struggles of the passengers on the Komagata Maru ship who were illegally and forcibly turned back from the Canadian shores.
- (3) To honour the united and determined struggle of the people from the Indian Sub-continent, already living in Canada, who had put up the most heroic efforts to support the passengers on the ship.
- (4) To demand from the Canadian government a formal and unqualified recognition that a gross injustice was done to the passengers on Komagata Maru, and to seek ways for an honourable redress.
- (5) To celebrate the perseverance and growth of the community in Canada whose roots go back to the Indian sub-continent, the many achievements it has made in the many decades, and its contributions toward the enrichment of the Canadian society.

The Orientation and the Guiding Principles:

- (1) The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY recognizes the important role the Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver has played historically. It was the pioneer Society of our people, regardless of their religion and faith. It was the Khalsa Diwan Society which had organized the shore-based support Committee for the passengers of Komagata Maru.
- (2) Recognizing the vast growth and diversity in our community over the last 75 years and recognizing also that Komagata Maru is the shared heritage of all sections of our community, the KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will endeavour to unite all segments of our community, not only in the Vancouver area and in B.C., but across Canada, in order to have a most effective and lasting impact on the Canadian society.
- (3) Membership in the KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will be by organizations. Regardless of size and histories, all member organizations joining the Society will be treated as equals. In all published form, their names will appear alphabetically.
- (4) The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will conduct its business in a democratic manner : arriving at all decisions with the fullest and open discussion and majority opinion.
- (5) The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will not be limited to only commemorating the 75th anniversary of the incident. It will have a long-term perspective, to continue to carry out the objectives listed above. And, **finally**,
- (6) The KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will operate on the principle of self-reliance. Recognizing the humiliation which the policies of the Canadian government had inflicted upon our community in 1914 and later, and recognizing the importance of self-esteem and collective dignity for the community, the KOMAGATA MARU HISTORICAL SOCIETY will not seek any funds from any level of government in Canada. It will rely on the community's own resources to carry out its many activities.