



POLISH-CANADIAN WOMEN'S FEDERATION

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November 15, 2007

Hon. Diane Finley, P.C. M.P.
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
Ottawa, Ont. K1A 1L1

Dear Minister:

Polish Canadian Women's Federation is concerned about the tragic event that occurred at the Canadian Border at the Vancouver airport on October 13, 2007 when Robert Dziekanski, an 40 year old immigrant from Poland, arrived to join his mother, Zofia Cisowski..

We are not satisfied with the media reports which leave many questions unanswered in this tragic event. The following are some questions that come to mind:

1. Why was Mr. Robert Dziekanski prevented from seeing his mother, Zofia Cisowski, who was waiting for him at the airport? Why was he kept inside of the security area for such a long period of time?
2. Why was Zofia Cisowska,, who speaks English, informed by the Airport officials that her son had not arrive? Are there no immigration or custom official to assist and offer accurate information as to the status of arriving family members?
3. Why didn't the RCMP investigate first before using a taser? It appears that the RCMP did not assess the situation but rushed into action with deadly results. Why didn't the RCMP contact airport security who could potentially locate a translator. Mr. Robert Dziekanski who did not speak English, was visibly upset, however that does not justify such violence as displayed by the RCMP. He did not attack police and was no security risk.
4. In an article "RCMP has a lot to answer for in heartbreaking taser death" published on Oct.20, 2007, in the Globe and Mail one reporter says "the police were too hasty in using their tasers", they spent "so little time trying to figure out what Dziekanski's problem was" and then he says, "My heart breaks for Zofia Cisowski."

Our hearts break for Zofia Cisowski, not only because she is a woman, a mother, and Canadian Citizen of Polish descent, but also because she is one of those who was powerless and who became in a sense a victim of the whole complex system. Canada is known to welcome immigrants, and as such there must be a sensitive to the barriers they face: language, culture, and a certain sense of loss at arrival. We should be better prepared to cope with such situations in the future.

Interpreters should be available to assist newcomers. There should be medical services in cases of medical emergencies. In this case, the person who was perceived a threat became a powerless victim.

As Mr.Dziekanski was a Polish citizen, the airport officials could have contacted the Polish Consulate in Vancouver or Polish Canadian Congress. There should be a better link with various ethnic communities to help in difficult situations.

We are writing to you not only because you are the Minister responsible for Citizenship and Immigration but also because you are a woman able to offer sympathy to another woman, a Canadian citizen, Zofia Cisowska who was badly served by the system. The lack of sensitivity and incompetence demonstrated by the officials at the airport are alarming. Rigid adherence to the bureaucratic procedures, lack of understanding of how to deal with immigrants, who speak different languages and are from different cultures, led to a serious misunderstanding that cost a innocent man his life and his mother the care which he was to offer her.

How is Mrs.Zofia Cisowski going to be compensated for such a great loss? Our branch in Vancouver has already made a donation to help Zofia Cisowski,, other branches across Canada are following suit. Similar action is being taken by the Polish Canadian Congress and other organizations in the Polish community. The real worry is what happens in the future. Will Zofia Cisowska receive compensation from the RCMP ?

It is our hope that this incident will help to reform both immigration and police services. We fully support and understand that security measures have to be taken but we do object to insensitive and brutal treatment. This man was not a security threat, he was not a terrorist! The problem was that he was treated as if he was one. Zofia Cisowska spent 6 hours waiting for him. Nobody took the time to help her to locate him at the airport. Nobody cared to make an effort to find him. Nobody took the time to help Mr. Robert Dziekanski locate his mother.

It is really ironic and tragic to find out that only a glass door divided them.

Will we have our questions answered? Will there be some reforms of the process in which new immigrants are being handled at the border? Would the custom officials at the airport learn their lesson and improve their services? Will the RCMP officers receive training in proper use of tasers?

We expect that you will send us answers to these questions and that the Immigration Department will communicate with the mother and consider offering her some compensation and apology.

Awaiting your reply

Yvonne Bogorya-Buczowski
President

cc. Ambassador of Poland; Consul General Toronto & Vancouver; President, Canadian Polish Congress; Provincial Council of Women; Canadian Ethno-cultural Council