

Sikh TSA agent wins suit over religious wristband

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c. 2012 Religion News Service WASHINGTON (RNS) A Sikh security officer at New York's largest airport won a \$30,000 settlement against the Department of Homeland Security, which had forbidden him from displaying his kara -- a wristband that Sikhs wear to remind them of the divine.

Kulwinder Singh called it a violation of his religious rights, and took his case to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC determined that the Transportation Security Administration was wrong to have Singh hide his kara under a long-sleeved shirt, or not wear it at all.

The case alleged discrimination on the basis of Singh's religion under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The EEOC decided the case in March and required the TSA to allow employees to wear the kara freely, and to post a notice of the violation by mid-June.

"Whenever you raise your hand, it's supposed to be there," said Singh, who has worked as a TSA agent at John F. Kennedy International Airport for more than five years. Nearly two years ago, he was told by a supervisor to remove the kara, or hide it.

The kara, a steel or iron band which also represents the eternal nature of the divine, is supposed to remind the wearer to behave righteously and to protect others. "By keeping it concealed, it defeats that purpose," said Hansdeep Singh, an attorney who represented Kulwinder Singh.

The DHS did not immediately comment on the settlement.

Hansdeep Singh said he sees discrimination against Sikhs -- a 500-year-old monotheistic religion practiced mostly in Southeast Asia -- as a litmus test for discrimination in general, because Sikhism is manifested in adherents' outward appearance.

Beyond the kara, Sikh men don't cut their hair and wear it under turbans.

Sikh and Muslim workers at New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority recently won a ruling that allows them to wear blue turbans on the job without having to affix an MTA logo.