

# Wallenberg-Sugihara Civil Courage Society

## 2015 Civil Courage Award recipient: The Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh

Born in a village in Punjab, India, the Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh emigrated to the United Kingdom at the age of 17 and moved to Canada almost four years later. He settled in Vancouver where he worked numerous manual labour jobs during the day and attended university, studying political science at night. Mr. Dosanjh received a BA from Simon Fraser University and went on to earn his law degree from the University of British Columbia. During his student years advocating for human rights became a core principle, motivating and inspiring him throughout his life.

The Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh opened a law practice in Vancouver. He went on to win a seat in the provincial legislature in 1991, was appointed to Attorney General and in 2000 became Canada's first Indo-Canadian provincial Premier. Elected to the federal Legislature, Mr. Dosanjh was appointed federal Health Minister and served in Parliament until 2011.

The Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh is a secular Sikh who speaks openly about civil rights issues. In 1985 the Indian Army attacked the Golden Temple in the Punjab in order to flush out extremists. Mr. Dosanjh warned the Canadian government of the possibility of serious sectarian violence erupting in Canada. His warning went unheeded and four months later Air India flight 182 was bombed. In the wake of this disaster, Mr. Dosanjh continued to publicly denounce the use of violence as a means of establishing an independent Sikh homeland in India.

As a result of expressing his pacifist views, the Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh was attacked with a metal bar outside his law office and severely beaten. He was targeted again in 1999 when a Molotov cocktail was thrown into his constituency office. As recently as April 2010, the RCMP had to investigate threats that were made against Mr. Dosanjh on a Facebook site. The Parliament of Canada has specifically condemned any death threats made against him.

In July 2014, the Honourable Ujjal Dosanjh spoke about life in Canada and how important it is for new immigrants to adopt the Canadian principles of a liberal democracy, free from violence. Throughout his life, Mr. Dosanjh has been an advocate for social justice and a critic of sectarian violence, often at great risk to his personal safety. As a critic of extremism and champion of liberal democracy he has been a benefit to Canada and an inspiration to us all.

### **Wallenberg-Sugihara Civil Courage Award Criteria**

The Wallenberg-Sugihara Civil Courage Award is given to an individual associated with British Columbia, who at great personal risk helped improve the lives of others and society, while defying unjust laws, norms, conventions or unethical behaviours of the time and place.