

Air India memorial unveiled in Toronto ceremony



Mourners place flowers following the unveiling of a memorial for the victims of Air India flight 182 at a waterfront park in Toronto on Saturday, June 23, 2007. (CP / Frank Gunn)

CTV.ca News Staff

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Twenty-two years to the day after the tragic bombing of Air India Flight 182, a memorial was unveiled in Toronto on Saturday honouring the 329 who died when the flight went down off the coast of Ireland.

"It's very serene, very beautiful -- they couldn't have chosen a better place," said Jayashree Thampi, spokesperson for the Air India Victims' Families Association.

Thampi's daughter and husband were killed in the terrorist attack.

"There is work to do still," she added. "Hopefully with the inquiry, we'll get some kind of closure. I don't think we'll ever get justice."

The memorial in Etobicoke features a granite wall inscribed with the names of the victims, a sundial and landscaped gardens.

There is a similar memorial in Ireland, and one is also planned for Vancouver. About 150 families attended the Saturday ceremony.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Toronto Mayor David Miller all spoke at the ceremony, discussing the lessons learned and the importance of remembering the repercussions of violence.

"We truly understand no political ideology is so important, no religious dogma so righteous, no ethnic grievance so just that it can ever be used to justify such barbarism," Harper said at the sun drenched location on the shore of Lake Ontario.

He added that his government is serious about the threat of terrorism, as evidenced by its decision to launch an inquiry into the tragedy, and said "we must act to ensure such an atrocity is never again visited upon our fellow citizens."

Representatives of the families of the victims of the tragedy said the memorial helps bring closure and gives them a tangible place to grieve the loved ones lost on June 23, 1985, and in a related bombing at Japan's Narita airport on the same day.

Toronto Mayor David Miller said Canada's largest city grieved for those who were killed.

"By building this memorial we are saying that in this city there is no room for violence, there is no room for injustice, there is no room for hate."

McGuinty said the gathering underscored the importance of gathering together and taking time to remember the victims of terror, and said he hoped the memorial would help bring a sense of peace to the families of the victims.

"You are here because 22 years ago you lost someone you loved. ... today I hope you will remember their faces, their smiles, their laughter and everything good they brought into your life. I hope you will feel the love and support of your fellow Canadians so you will know you are not in this alone."



Many family members showed their emotion at the long awaited unveiling.

Air India victims' family members Anita Gupta (left), Jayashree Phampi and Tania Desa (right) lay a wreath at the unveiling of a memorial for the victims of Air India flight in Toronto on Saturday, June 23, 2007. (CP / Frank Gunn)

McGuinty quoted the English poet William Wordsworth, suggesting hope for a better, more peaceful world must never be abandoned.

"'Hope is the everlasting duty that heaven lays for its own sake on man's suffering heart.' I love that definition because it speaks of hope as a duty, indeed as an obligation, a shared responsibility," he said.

Only one man has ever been convicted in the attacks. Inderjit Singh Reyat was sentenced to five years in prison in 2003. He reached a plea deal with prosecutors and was convicted on lesser charges of manslaughter and with assisting in the construction of the bomb.

A public inquiry into the disaster, led by former Supreme Court justice John Major, will resume its work in the fall after taking a break for the summer.

The project was co-coordinated by Peter Klambauer for the City of Toronto. He told The Canadian Press the memorial is truly a national creation comprised of exquisite craftsmanship.

"The sundial is supported by a wall that is made in part from stones from all of the provinces and territories in Canada," he said. "There are also stones there from the countries of United States of America, Ireland, India and Japan. All of these countries were directly affected by the tragedy."

The City of Toronto donated the land for the memorial as well as expertise to help with the planning and

management of the project. The federal and provincial government donated funding.
With a report from CTV's Roger Petersen and files from The Canadian Press

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