



# World Sikh Council – America Region

*A Representative Body of Sikh Institutions of America Working under the Patronage of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib*

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## Member Gurdwaras

1. Gurdwara Sahib Fremont, Fremont, CA
2. Guru Nanak Sikh Mission, Livingston, CA
3. Sikh Gurdwara of LA, North Hollywood, CA
4. Sikh Gurdwara Riverside, Riverside, CA
5. Colorado Singh Sabha, Denver, CO
6. Guru Singh Sabha of Augusta, Augusta, GA
7. Sikh Study Circle of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA
8. Sikh Religious Society of Chicago, Palatine, IL
9. Sikh Society of South, New Orleans, LA
10. Sikh Gurdwara of Michigan, Rochester Hills, MI
11. Sikh Society of Michigan, Madison Heights, MI
12. Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC
13. Garden State Sikh Association, Pluckemin, NJ
14. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ
15. Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY
16. Sikh Cultural & Edu. Society of Western NY, Buffalo, NY
17. Sikh Religious Society of Dayton, Dayton, OH
18. Guru Nanak Foundation of Greater Cleveland, Richfield, OH
19. Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society, Bedford, OH
20. Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
21. Mid South Sikh Sabha, Memphis, TN
22. Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
23. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Richardson, TX
24. Sikh Gurdwara of North Texas, Garland, TX
25. Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Fairfax, VA
26. Sikh Religious Society of Wisconsin, Brookfield, WI
27. Sikh Association of Central Virginia, VA
28. Guru Nanak Religious Society, Columbus, OH

## Other Sikh Institution Members:

1. Siri Guru Granth Sahib Found., Anaheim, CA
2. Sikhs Serving America, Topeka, KS
3. Sikh Youth Federation of North America, White Plains, NY
4. Sikh Educational & Religious Foundation, Dublin, OH
5. Sikh Youth Federation of USA, Toledo, OH
6. Academy of Guru Granth Studies, Arlington, TX
7. Sikh Coalition, New York, NY
8. Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART)

*Poh 23, 535 Nanakshahi*  
January 5, 2004

**Monsieur Jacques Chirac**  
**Le Président de la République**  
**Palais de l'Elysée**  
**55, rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré**  
**75008 Paris France**

Dear Président Chirac:

On behalf of the 500,000 strong Sikhs of the United States, I am disappointed to hear that you have called upon the legislative body of France to ban conspicuous religious symbols, including head dresses from government schools and possibly other public places in the name of separation of church and state. This can create a great hardship for a law-abiding and peaceful Sikh religious minority in France.

By adopting such a law, France will not only be forcing Sikh students in government schools of your country to choose between their religion and education, but also be interfering in their religious beliefs. France has been known as the champion of human rights and religious freedom. This statement of yours seems to violate the spirit of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948 and one in which France played an important role.

Mr. President, please permit me to quote the pertinent articles of this historic Declaration to illustrate my point:

Article 7: “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of the Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.”

Article 18: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

For a person practicing the Sikh religion, cutting of hair is forbidden and observant Sikh men and women are required to cover their heads in public. The Sikh men wear a turban. Sikh women also wear a turban, a scarf or a shawl as a mandatory means of covering the head in public. A ban on the turban or scarf will deny the Sikhs their most legitimate fundamental right to practice their religion. It will affect more than 7,000 Sikhs residing in France and hurt the feelings of more than 25 million Sikhs all over the world. Such legislation will not only hurt the Sikhs, but also other religious minorities in France.

It should be noted that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sikhs as a sovereign nation, had very cordial diplomatic relations with France. Several French military officers such as General Jean-Francois Allard, General Ventura (who earlier served as a Colonel in Napoleon's army), and Col. Francois-Henri Mouton served in the Sikh army in Punjab, South Asia during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In World War I & II, a large number of turbaned Sikh soldiers in the British Indian army shed their blood in France and helped her in defeating its enemies and Nazi Germany. The turbaned Sikh soldiers first landed in Marseilles on September 26, 1914 and received heroes' welcome by the French people. The major battles during World War I in France in which Sikhs fought valiantly were: Ypres, La Bassée, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Loos, Givenchy and Somme.

On behalf of World Sikh Council – America Region, I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision, and issue a more constructive statement to enable all the residents of your country to practice the religion of their choice freely.

In the service of Humanity.

Sincerely,

S. Amarjit Singh Buttar

Chairman, World Sikh Council - America Region

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