



World Sikh Council – America Region

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

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OPEN LETTER TO THE HONORABLE SENATOR JOHN KERRY

February 12, 2004

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 Found. of Greater Cleveland, Richfield, OH
19. Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society, Bedford, OH
20. Guru Nanak Relig. Soc. of Central Ohio, Columbus, OH
21. Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
22. Mid South Sikh Sabha, Memphis, TN
23. Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
24. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Richardson, TX
25. Sikh Gurdwara of North Texas, Garland, TX
26. Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Fairfax, VA
27. Sikh Association of Central Virginia, VA
28. Sikh Religious Society of Wisconsin, Brookfield, WI

Other Sikh Institution Members:

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

Honorable Senator John Kerry
304 Russell Building
Third Floor
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kerry:

We, the Sikh-Americans, have been watching your well-deserved success in the primaries with admiration. We are greatly impressed by your dynamism and stimulating policy projections, both foreign and domestic.

Unfortunately, we were shocked by your comment of January 31, 2004 linking Sikhs with terrorism. While it has caused us profound pain and agony, we appreciate your prompt and positive response of February 6, 2004, which reflects your thoughtfulness and statesmanship.

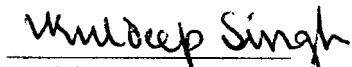
As it were, a peaceful Sikh struggle for redeeming our distinct national status has been subjected to India's state terrorism and anti-Sikh media blitz. Thousands of Sikhs -- men, women, and children -- have been massacred during this official reign of terror in the 1980's and 1990's. Our repeated appeals for transparency, accountability, and restitution have been ignored and relegated to "a cry in the wilderness." This has been amply documented in many fact-finding reports by human rights organizations and independent observers, both in India and abroad. We are enclosing excerpts from these reports, along with a copy of the latest fact-finding book, Reduced to Ashes, prepared by South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu (Nepal).

Throughout our 500-year old history, the Sikhs have stood for justice, equality, human dignity, and freedom of conscience for all without any distinction by caste, creed, color, race, gender, or religion. While 13 American colonies were consolidating their independence in the late 1700's, the Sikhs under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were liberating Punjab and Kashmir from Afghan rulers. While the rest of the Indian subcontinent was under the British rule, the Sikh Commonwealth was established in 1799 as an independent sovereign state. Since the British annexation of Punjab in 1849, the Sikh nation has been struggling to regain its sovereign national status.

We are neither advocates of a partition of the Indian subcontinent nor do we support violence. On the contrary, we would like to build bridges across the existing hostile and arbitrary boundaries and blend them into a South Asian Commonwealth of free nations (consisting of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Punjab – The Sikh Homeland, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Tamil Homeland) like the European Union. In this new regional infrastructure, the culture of oppression and killing can be replaced by the culture of freedom and living.

We would like to meet with you soon, at a place and time convenient to you, for further dialogue on this matter. With best wishes and warm regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kuldeep Singh". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

Kuldeep Singh
Chairman, World Sikh Council – America Region

FACTS vs. FICTION

Pertaining to the Tragedy in Punjab

The following excerpts are from some fact-finding reports and independent observers: **(NB: All the quotes are from non-Sikhs)**

"...over 100,000 (Sikh) volunteers have been arrested. This high number of arrests is undoubtedly, a national record and so has been the peaceful nature in which the Satyagrahas (protests) of this magnitude have been handled by the Sikhs, with extreme tolerance." **(S.M. Sathanathan, et. al., Hindu-Sikh Conflict in Punjab: Cause and Cure, London: Transatlantic India Times, 1983, p. 15)**

"The Akali Dal (the Sikh Organization) is in the hands of moderate and sensible leadership...but giving anyone a fair share of power is unthinkable politics of Mrs. Gandhi... Many Hindus in Punjab privately concede that there isn't much wrong with these (Sikh) demands. But every time the ball goes to the Congress Court, it is kicked out one way or another because Mrs. Gandhi considers it a good electoral calculation." **(Pran Chopra, Wall Street Journal, September 26, 1983)**

"When the agitation began...it was led by reasonable men seeking a reasonable settlement of reasonable demands. And at least three times there were prospects of agreement...but each time Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sabotaged the agreements." **(Kuldip Nayar, India Abroad Weekly, New York, June 22, 1984)**

"The ugly situation prevailing in Punjab would not have taken place if the legitimate demands of the Sikh community had been conceded. In fact, there should have been no need for anyone to have agitated for these demands in the first place if events had moved on the principle of justice and fair play." **(Bharat Kumar Baweja, India Abroad Weekly, New York, June 29, 1984)**

"There was a nonviolent Sikh protest movement, but it was eclipsed when the Prime Minister rebuffed its demands...Since Indian independence in 1947, Sikhs have pleaded for greater autonomy and for specific recognition of their religion in the Constitution." **(The New York Times, Editorial, June 8, 1984)**

"Proclaiming the primacy of national union even over a religious shrine, Mrs. Gandhi ordered a bloody assault last June, and loosed the demons that apparently claimed her life." **(The New York Times, November 1, 1984)**

"...over a thousand pilgrims including children and old people quite unconnected with the separatists, were locked into a courtyard and attacked with grenades and machine guns. Those left alive were then prevented from leaving the building, many wounded were left to bleed to death...some 3,000 dead, including many who were only unconscious, were piled high in trucks and removed." **(Amrit Wilson, New Statesman, November 16, 1984)**

"The whole of Punjab and especially the Golden Temple Complex, was turned into a murderous mouse trap from where people could neither escape nor could they seek succor of any kind...The way the dead bodies were disposed of adds to the suspicions regarding the number and nature of the casualties...The bodies of the victims of military operation in Punjab were unceremoniously destroyed (the report refers to Chapter II Article 17 of Geneva Convention of 1949) without any attempt to identify them and hand them over to their relatives...So even the courtesy and honor customarily shown to the dead soldiers of the enemy was not shown to our dead countrymen, since those killing them were our own soldiers. Because the government had decided to exterminate these victims physically they ceased to exist as persons deserving any honor of human dignity. We lack even the civility of the British imperialists, who after the

Jalianwala blood bath instituted the Hunter Commission to make a thorough enquiry into the events. The government, after the operation, on the other hand, did every thing in its power to cover up the excesses of the army action...The most disturbing thing about the entire operation was that a whole mass of men, women, and children were ordered to be killed merely on the suspicion that some terrorists were operating from the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras. There had been no judicial verdict of guilt against definite individuals who had been taking shelter in the Golden Temple." (CKC Reddy, et. al., Army Action in Punjab: Prelude & Aftermath, New Delhi: Samata Era Publication, 1984, pp. 46-48)

"The pattern in each village appears to be the same. The Army moves in during the early evening, cordons a village, and announces over loudspeakers that everyone must come out. All males between the ages of 15 and 35 are trussed and blindfolded, then taken away...Thousands have disappeared in the Punjab since the Army Operation began. The government has provided no lists of names; families don't know if sons and husbands are arrested underground or dead." (Mary Anne Weaver, The Christian Science Monitor, October 15, 1984)

"The new report, titled 'Oppression in Punjab,' contains a foreword by Judge V .M. Tarkunde, which accuses the Government of 'inhuman barbarities' against the people of Punjab...It asserts that 'clearly innocent' people have been arrested and that the police in the state had carried out sadistic torture, ruthless killings, fake encounters, calculated ill treatment of women and children..." (Steven Weisman, The New York Times, September 16, 1985)

"...an undeclared, unilateral ruthless war - against hundred of innocent defenceless men and women in far-away tiny villages of Punjab from where their voices do not reach the rest of India...In the name of curbing terrorism, unabashed state terrorism has been unleashed on the Sikhs branding them as criminals, arbitrary arrests and McCarthy style witch-hunt, sadistic torture...shooting down of young men in false encounters are common occurrences; even village women are not spared, they are being harassed and beaten up, dishonored and taken away to Police Stations or to unknown destinations...The eye witnesses witnessed the use of gas by the Army, the pile of dead bodies on the 'Parikarma,' the arrival of tanks which some of them thought were the ambulances, the hovering of helicopter at night, throwing their search light on targets which were bombed, the wanton destruction of the Akal Takht (the Eternal Throne), the Research Library and the Museum...Today, it is the State itself which openly indulges not only in murder and assault but also in inhuman torture, molestation of women...and false encounters leading to gruesome death...Our visit was almost like lifting the corner of a veil to discover a face - an amazing face full of conflicting emotions, suffering yet defiant, anguished yet challenging, tortured yet proud." (Judge V.M. Tarkunde, et. al., Oppression in Punjab: Report to the Nation, New Delhi: Citizens for Democracy, 1985, pp. 8-10, 18-19)

"Amnesty International was concerned about the detention of prisoners of conscience and about large number of political detainees. It was also concerned about allegations of torture, in several cases reportedly resulting in death in custody...On June 14 (1984) Amnesty International telexed the Prime Minister...asking whether the 6,500 people reportedly arrested would be charged with specific criminal offenses or released...The Government's reply did not answer any of the specific queries put by Amnesty International in its communications of 14 and 27 June (1984)." (Amnesty International Report, 1985, pp. 209-210)

" A good part of the violence is instigated by the Government through its agents...because the Government could not deal with the non-violent Akali morcha (Sikh protest)...How you legitimize oppression of peaceful morcha (protest) ...You inject violence into the movement and then it becomes a

way of justifying oppression." (Professor Madhu Kishwar of Delhi University, India Observer, August 1, 1986)

"I visited Punjab on numerous occasions specially during the critical months preceding the ill-fated Operation Blue Star to evaluate the situation first-hand. I lived inside the Golden Temple on three different occasions including a stay of three days just prior to the Temple invasion. After extended discussions with key figures like Sant H.S. Langowal, G.S. Tohra, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Hindu community leaders, police and administrative officials, press and people at large, I found most of the central government claims, regarding the situation untenable and misleading. The people of Punjab indeed have genuine grievances based on legitimate socio-economic, political and religious grounds. Objectivity was the first casualty of the center government's media and public relations blitzkrieg in anticipation and aftermath of the military action. Indian press, with few exceptions, eagerly accepted the government's version of the events and unfairly rested the entire blame of the crisis on the Sikh community and its leadership." (Professor Subramaniam Swamy of Harvard University and member of the Indian Parliament, in a foreword in Punjab Under Siege: A Critical Analysis, New York: Allen, McMillan & Enderson, 1986)

"The army went into Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple Complex) not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence." (Joyce Pettigrew, The Sikhs of Punjab, London: Zed Publishers, 1995)

"The silence of graveyard that obtains in Punjab today is not a reflection of peace. The enquiry being conducted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in the disappearances and illegal cremations in Punjab, shows the deep social division that is endangering the prospects of justice and peace in the state...Although this matter or police abductions leading to illegal cremations was initiated six years ago before the NHRC, the commission unfortunately has failed to examine a single case of abuse. It has also not heard a single victim's testimony or deposition." (Introduction by Tapan Bose in Reduced to Ashes (Volume One) a report on human rights violations in Punjab, compiled by Ram Narayan Kumar, et. al., and published by South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2003, www.punjabjustice.org/report/report.htm)

"On the strength of... constitutional features, India claims to be the largest functional democracy in the world where wide-spread human rights abuses, systematic persecution of estranged communities and suppression of political dissent cannot occur. However, the experiences of the Sikhs in Punjab show that as a demonised community targeted for abuse by the authorities, they had no protection from the leaders of the supposedly independent institutions, including the judiciary, either in shielding their fundamental rights against imminent violations or in obtaining acknowledgement and legal restitution of wrongs. Freedom of discourse remained an empty promise which even the higher judiciary joined the chorus to turn the page and obliterate the victims' memory on the grounds that a public discussion and scrutiny focusing on past abuses and the role of institutions would undermine the interests of peace and social order." (Ram Narayan Kumar, et. al., Reduced to Ashes (Volume One), Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2003, pp. 75, www.punjabjustice.org/report/report.htm)

THE ABOVE EXCERPTS FROM VOLUMINOUS REPORTS, EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS, AND OTHER MATERIALS REPRESENT ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. THE US EMBASSY IN NEW DELHI, INDIA SHOULD HAVE ALL THIS MATERIAL IN ORIGINAL.