



# World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR)

*A representative body of Sikh institutions of America founded under the patronage of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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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. Guru Nanak Foundation of Jackson, MS
13. Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC
14. Garden State Sikh Association, Bridgewater, NJ
15. Guru Nanak Sikh Society of Delaware Valley, Sewell, NJ
16. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ
17. Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY
18. Sikh Cultural & Edu. Society of Western NY, Buffalo, NY
19. Sikh Religious Society of Dayton, Dayton, OH
20. Guru Nanak Found. of Greater Cleveland, Richfield, OH
21. Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society, Bedford, OH
22. Guru Nanak Religious Soc. of Central Ohio, Columbus, OH
23. Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
24. Mid South Sikh Sabha, Memphis, TN
25. Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
26. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Richardson, TX
27. Sikh Gurdwara of North Texas, Garland, TX
28. Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Fairfax, VA
29. Sikh Association of Central Virginia, VA
30. Sikh Religious Society of Wisconsin, Brookfield, WI

## **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

## **WSC-AR Follows up With UNESCO on Consideration of Siri Darbar Sahib; Calls Upon Sikh Community to Organize Worldwide Protests**

The World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR) notes with satisfaction media reports that a majority of the dossier special sub-committee, appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has recommended that the proposal to declare Siri Darbar Sahib a UNESCO world heritage site should be withdrawn immediately. WSC-AR also notes that the SGPC is considering the recommendations of the sub-committee.

Unfortunately, the matter does not rest there. The WSC-AR has been advised in the last few days by Mr. Giovanni Boccardi, Chief of Asia and Pacific Unit of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (WHC) in Paris, France, that:

- "On 25th of March, the WHC had received a request from SGPC to suspend the project...The request of SGPC had been immediately conveyed to the State Party of India through its Permanent Delegation to UNESCO. No response to date has been received by WHC from the State Party of India."
- "India has the option of not responding to the clarification asked of it regarding SGPC's request to suspend the process."

- “The SGPC was not the nominating entity but instead it was the State Party of India...The nomination cannot be withdrawn by SGPC but that the State Party of India is the only authority that can withdraw the nomination... If the State Party of India chooses not to respond or declines to withdraw the nomination, there is not much WHC can do.”
- “In the case the State Party of India chooses not to withdraw the nomination, it will be processed under the current framework and will come up for consideration and possible approval in the July 2005 meeting of the 21 member World Heritage Committee to be held in South Africa. This meeting will be chaired by a representative of South Africa.”
- Written communications submitted to UNESCO are “shared with the 21 members of the World Heritage Committee” as summary comments but not verbatim...“However, all correspondence is shared with ICOMOS [International Council on Monuments and Sites] and it is kept fully informed on all matters pertaining to a nomination.”
- UNESCO has “received many letters and communications from Sikh organizations across the world raising objections and concerns with regard to the nomination and its submitted dossier.”
- Media reports that a representative of UNESCO will be visiting Siri Darbar Sahib soon are “incorrect” because “the visit of the UNESCO representative will be to the Buddhist Mahabodhi Temple in Bihar, and not to Siri Darbar Sahib.”
- Mr. Boccardi “will be meeting with the Director of the Archeological Survey of India next week.”

Because the SGPC does not have the authority to withdraw the nomination made by the State Party of India, the fact that it has withdrawn its request or requested that the nomination be in abeyance is not material to the world heritage nomination process. Unless withdrawn by the State Party of India, the nomination “will be processed under the current framework and will come up for consideration and possible approval in the July 2005 meeting of the 21 member World Heritage Committee to be held in South Africa.”

WSC-AR affirms that the request to nominate Siri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, as a cultural symbol of Indian civilization by the State Party of India is mischievous and wrong. The dossier submitted by the State Party in collaboration with the SGPC is misleading, has serious flaws, and is strongly objected to by Sikhs around the world.

The fundamental argument set forth in the nomination dossier that Siri Darbar Sahib represents the cultural heritage and uniqueness of Indian civilization is misleading and incorrect. Such claims undermine the religious importance of this site and are offensive. The status of Siri Darbar Sahib in the Sikh Religion is similar to that of the Kaaba in Islam and the Vatican in Roman Catholicism. Kaaba is not a Saudi Arabian cultural site but the center of Islam; the Vatican is not an Italian cultural entity but the center of the Roman Catholic faith. Neither of these two places is on the World Heritage List under Saudi Arabia or Italy. Siri Darbar Sahib is the heartthrob of a living faith; it is not an archeological relic or a symbol of Indian culture and it is not a cultural tourist site.

WSC-AR calls upon the Indian Government (State Party of India) to respect the religious sentiments of one of its religious minorities, to immediately withdraw the nomination and dossier submitted by it to UNESCO, and to end its interference in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. WSC-AR requests Sikhs all over the world to ask the State Party of India to end this misadventure.

WSC-AR calls upon Sikh organizations across the world to urgently contact their respective country’s UNESCO delegation and request they vote no for world heritage status for Siri Darbar Sahib, prior to the July 2005 vote at the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in South Africa.

WSC-AR especially calls upon the SGPC and other Sikh organizations in Punjab and the rest of India to act without delay and organize massive peaceful protests to ensure that the State Party of India withdraws this ill-fated nomination.

WSC-AR has been in touch with UNESCO since January 2005 and has exchanged several written communications. On March 29, 2005, WSC-AR had publicly urged UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre to immediately drop the consideration of Siri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for world heritage status after reviewing a written response from UNESCO and the complete three-volume nomination dossier. In a letter addressed to Mr. Francesco Bandarin (Director of UNESCO World Heritage Centre), dated March 25, 2005, WSC-AR had communicated that pursuing this project would entail serious protests by Sikhs around the globe as interference in their religious affairs. The March 29, 2005 press statement issued by WSC-AR can be accessed at [www.worldsikhcouncil.org](http://www.worldsikhcouncil.org).

The WSC-AR is a representative and elected body of Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions in the United States. Its members include 36 Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) and other Sikh institutions across the nation.

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