



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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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
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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 Urges UNESCO to Drop Consideration of Siri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for World Heritage Status

The World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR) has urged UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre to immediately drop the consideration of Siri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for world heritage status.

In a letter addressed to Mr. Francesco Bandarin (Director of UNESCO World Heritage Centre), dated March 25, 2005, WSC-AR communicated that pursuing this project would entail serious protests by Sikhs around the globe as interference in their religious affairs.

The WSC-AR has been in touch with UNESCO since January of 2005. Having reviewed the response from UNESCO and the complete three volume nomination dossier made available by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) at its website, it is the considered opinion of the World Sikh Council – America Region that the request to nominate Siri Darbar Sahib 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.

Siri Darbar Sahib, located in the South Asian city of Amritsar, Punjab, is the central Sikh place of worship for 25 million Sikhs worldwide. It was established by the founders of the faith and holds deep historical and spiritual significance for the entire Sikh community spread across the globe. The Sikh Diaspora, including large Sikh communities in Europe, North America, and the Far East, has not been consulted in this proposal and in the preparation of the nomination dossier submitted to UNESCO.

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.

Emotionally and spiritually Siri Darbar Sahib has the greatest importance to Sikhs worldwide. It is managed by the SGPC as a representative body of Sikhs living in Punjab and Haryana states of India. The SGPC does not represent Sikhs outside these two Indian states. It certainly does not represent Sikhs living outside India. The nomination dossier claims on page I-160 and II-27 that "The SGPC is acknowledged as the highest authority in religious matters by Sikhs worldwide" and "It [SGPC] takes decisions on religious matters which are considered final by all Sikhs." Both these statements are false and we take the strongest exception to these claims. The SGPC is merely a managing body operating under the laws of the states of Punjab and Haryana in India. It has no jurisdiction in matters of faith. Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib is that authority.

Since the overall responsibility for the protection of a world heritage site lies with the state party, the placing of Siri Darbar Sahib on this list would effectively cede control of the site to the Indian government. This is an affront to Sikhs everywhere. The Indian Government interference in Sikh religious affairs is already considerable because the SGPC has to operate under laws made by the Punjab and Haryana state governments. The experiences of the Sikh community worldwide over the last two decades have shown that the Indian State is attempting to extend not only its control of Sikh institutions and places of worship but to rewrite Sikh history and undermine the Sikh faith. Sikhs cannot forget the bloody invasion of Siri Darbar Sahib in 1984 followed by the attempted reconstruction of Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib and the construction of Galiyara (corridor) around the complex to ensure ease of armed intervention in the future.

The importance of the highest authority in the Sikh faith, Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib, has been significantly understated in the dossier. Decisions by Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib taken through a Sikh community consultation process (Gurmatta) are respected and followed by all Sikhs worldwide. The SGPC has recently been highly politicized. Acting in collusion with and under directives from the political establishment in India, this committee has undermined the status of Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib and attempted to make it subservient. The international Sikh community has been opposed to these moves and seeks to restore the position of Siri Akaal Takhat Sahib as the supreme authority not subject to the SGPC or the local politicians controlling that committee.

In addition, the nomination dossier contains numerous historical inaccuracies, factual mistakes, and misinformation about the Sikh faith and its history.

We call upon Sikh organizations across the world to write to Mr. Francesco Bandarin, Director of UNESCO World Heritage Centre, expressing concerns over the proposed project and requesting that the consideration of this proposal be dropped.

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.
