



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

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

**P.O. Box 3635, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA**

**Phone: 614-210-0591**

**E-mail: [contact@worldsikhcouncil.org](mailto:contact@worldsikhcouncil.org), Website: [www.worldsikhcouncil.org](http://www.worldsikhcouncil.org)**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Manmohan Singh, Secretary General  
972-684-4638, [contact@worldsikhcouncil.org](mailto:contact@worldsikhcouncil.org)

## 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 Sabha of New Jersey, Lawrenceville, NJ
18. Gurdwara Baba Deep Singh, Las Vegas, NV
19. Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY
20. Sikh Cultural & Edu. Society of Western NY, Buffalo, NY
21. Sikh Religious Society of Dayton, Dayton, OH
22. Guru Nanak Found. of Greater Cleveland, Richfield, OH
23. Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society, Bedford, OH
24. Guru Nanak Religious Soc. of Central Ohio, Columbus, OH
25. Sikh Sadh Sangat, Easton, PA
26. Philadelphia Sikh Society, Millbourne, PA
27. Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
28. Mid South Sikh Sabha, Memphis, TN
29. Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
30. Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Richardson, TX
31. Sikh Gurdwara of North Texas, Garland, TX
32. Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Fairfax, VA
33. Sikh Association of Central Virginia, VA
34. 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 Heritage Institute, Long Island, NY
5. Sikh Educational & Religious Foundation, Dublin, OH
6. Sikh Youth Federation of USA, Toledo, OH
7. Academy of Guru Granth Studies, Arlington, TX

## **International Conference Held at San Jose to Commemorate 400th Anniversary of Martyrdom of Fifth Sikh Guru Sahib; International Sikh Youth Symposium Planned for Seattle**

The World Sikh Council - America Region (WSC-AR) commemorated the historic 400th anniversary of the martyrdom of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib by sponsoring an international conference “**Siri Guru Arjan Sahib Ji's Life, Martyrdom, and Gifts to Humanity**”, July 28-29, 2006 at San Jose State University, California. More than a hundred Sikhs from across the world attended the conference.

An International Sikh Youth Symposium and Seminar has been arranged for August 4 – 6, 2006, by the Sikh Youth Federation in collaboration with WSC-AR at Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara Sahib, Renton, Washington. Additional information on it can be obtained by contacting Kuldeep Singh, Member of WSC-AR governing board, at <[sikhs@verizon.net](mailto:sikhs@verizon.net)>.

On Friday, July 28 afternoon at San Jose State University's Music Hall, two documentary presentations (Anniversary Celebrations at Lahore, Pakistan and Kristallnacht of Sikhs) were screened followed by Keertan (congregational singing) offered by Sikh youth groups from local Gurdwaras. Dr. Inderjit Kaur of the Sikh Music Heritage Institute presented a brief commentary on the musical styles included in Siri Guru Granth Sahib. Professor Dalbir Singh and Bhai Manmohan Singh also participated in leading the attendees in Keertan.

The formal dedication of the conference was held the morning of Saturday, July 29. The inaugural session included welcoming remarks by Dean Karl Toepfer of the College of Humanities and Arts, Dean Ruth Kifer of the Martin Luther King Library, and Dominique van Hooff, Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages at San Jose State University.

Dr. Manohar Singh, Chairperson of WSC-AR, dedicated the conference with his opening remarks by calling upon the Sikh community in the United States to “rededicate ourselves to the ideals that the Sikh Gurus laid out in Siri Guru Granth Sahib and lived in their own lifetimes.”

The opening session in the morning “Life and Martyrdom of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib” included highlight presentations by Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, Dr. Nirvikar Singh, Dr. Hakam Singh, and Dr. Inderjit Kaur. After lunch, four sessions were held. The first afternoon session “Harmandar Sahib” had presentations by Hardip Singh Pannu, Balvinder Singh, and Dr. Tarunjit Singh. The second afternoon session titled “Aad Granth and Siri Guru Granth Sahib” included presentations by Dr. Mohinder Kaur Gill, Dr. Jasmit Singh Kochhar, Dr. Kulbir Singh Thind, and Dr. Hardev Singh Virk. The third session in the afternoon, “Siri Guru Arjan Sahib’s Message”, consisted of presentations by Dr. Inder M. Singh, Dr. Nirmal Singh, Dr. R.K. Janmeja Singh, and Ekongar Kaur Khalsa. The last session of the conference was on “Interfaith Harmony and Understanding”. Dr. Tarunjit Singh presented a paper on interfaith dialogue in the US and the role of WSC-AR. The conference concluded with valedictory remarks by Dr. Inder M. Singh and a motion of thanks moved by Dr. Harnam Singh Shan.

Siri Guru Arjan Sahib was the fifth Guru in succession starting with Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, the founder of the Sikh Faith. Each of the Gurus took the name “Nanak” in their compositions. The compositions are distinguished by use of the word “Mahla” or the “Body”. Thus, Siri Guru Arjan Sahib’s compositions are designated as “by the Fifth Body”. This emphasizes that even though the ten Gurus were ten different beings, they embodied the same divine light as Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, the founder of the faith.

Siri Guru Arjan Sahib came to this world in 1563 C.E. as the youngest of three sons of the fourth Guru, Siri Guru Ram Dass. In 1581 C.E., before his light merged with the Divine Light, Siri Guru Ram Dass designated Siri Guru Arjan Sahib as his successor Guru. During his stewardship of the faith, Siri Guru Arjan Sahib continued his predecessors’ work of spreading the message of faith, hope, prayer, love and the unity of all faiths. He continued the tradition of service to all people regardless of their socio-economic status or religious belief. During his reign, the city of Amritsar grew significantly, and Harmandar Sahib was completed. He also founded the cities of Hargobindpur, Kartarpur, and Taran Taaran in Punjab (South Asia). Thriving communities developed at each of these sites.

Perhaps the most significant gift Siri Guru Arjan Sahib gave humankind was his compilation of the Divine Word brought by him and the preceding Gurus into a single volume. He also included selections from the works of several Muslim and Hindu saints (including Kabir and Sheikh Farid) that concurred with his divine message. This volume was known as the Aad Granth. Later, the Word brought by the ninth Guru was added. The completed volume was invested with the status of Eternal Guru by the tenth Guru, Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in 1708 C.E. It is referred to as Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

Siri Guru Arjan Sahib Ji, the Fifth Sikh Guru, was tortured to death on June 16, 1606 at Lahore (Punjab in South Asia) and his body was thrown in the river Ravi. A messenger of God’s love for all people was executed because of his growing popularity. Sikhs often refer to Siri Guru Arjan Sahib as “Shanti de Punj, Shaheedan de Sartaj” meaning “The embodiment of peace, the supreme martyr.” His martyrdom took place during the hottest part of the year and the torture is said to have included seating Guru Sahib on a hot tava (iron plate) and pouring hot sand over his body. Sikhs observe the anniversary of Guru Sahib’s martyrdom with congregational prayer, processions of worshippers singing prayers, and serving cold drinks to all.

The World Sikh Council - America Region (WSC-AR) is a representative and elected body of Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions in the United States. Its members include 42 Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) and other Sikh institutions across the nation. WSC-AR works to promote Sikh interests at the national and international level focusing on issues of advocacy, education, and the well-being of all humankind. For more information, please visit [www.worldsikhcouncil.org](http://www.worldsikhcouncil.org).

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The following photos in jpeg format, suitable for publication, can be obtained by e-mailing <[contact@worldsikhcouncil.org](mailto:contact@worldsikhcouncil.org)>:



Photo 1 Caption: Conference speakers and organizing committee take a tour of the Guru Nanak (Sahib) Study Alcove at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library at San Jose State University (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)



Photo 2 Caption: Dr. Manohar Singh, Chairperson of WSC-AR, delivers the opening remarks at the conference (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)



Photo 3 Caption: Sikh youth group leads in keertan (congregational singing) at the conference (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)



Photo 4 Caption: Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, former Guru Nanak Chair at Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, presents the inaugural paper of the conference “The Concept & Tradition of Martyrdom in Context of Martyrdom of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib” (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)



Photo 5 Caption: Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, Sikh scholar, present paper on “Faces of Martyrdom in Sikh History” (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)



Photo 6 Caption: Distinguished conference attendees included (left to right): Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu (former Secretary General of WSC-AR), Balvinder Singh (Reader, Guru Ramdas School of Planning at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, India, invited from India), Dr. Harnam Singh Shan (eminent Sikh historian invited from India), Dr. Manohar Singh (Chairperson of WSC-AR), Dr. Mohinder Kaur Gill (Chicago), and Dr. Sukhmandar Singh (Professor at Santa Clara University) (*Photo courtesy of WSC-AR*)