

The Sikh Manifesto Follow up 1 Year on

The Sikh Manifesto was launched as a historic next step for more effective Sikh participation in the political life of the nation. The focus was on the main Sikh issues to be raised in the lead up to the 2015 General Election and to be progressed by Members of Parliament (MPs) and political parties seeking and wishing to retain Sikh support in the next five years.

The Manifesto was widely viewed as a crucial development reflecting the political maturity of British Sikhs. It empowered the British Sikh community to engage much more effectively with UK politicians. It also provided the mainstream media and the wider public with a better understanding of the Sikh contribution, as well as the challenges the Sikhs continue to face in areas where progress is required.

It was designed to be used until the next General Election in 2020. It was applied successfully in the Labour leadership and deputy leadership contests last summer and has also been used in the elections this month for the Mayor for London. It is now time to ask MPs to explain what they have done with respect to some of the key issues in the Sikh Manifesto where priorities were set on things that could be achieved within specified time limits. The two key priorities to focus on in the first year were around a separate Sikh ethnic tick box in the 2021 Census and securing a suitable site in central London for a permanent monument to highlight Sikh sacrifices in the First World War.

7 May 2016 was seen as an important milestone. It marked exactly one year since the General Election and provided the opportunity to ask your elected representative what he or she had specifically done over the last 12 months with respect to some of the priorities set within the Sikh Manifesto as well as other relevant issues that may have emerged. For example, the attempted illegal extradition by India of Paramjeet Singh Pamma when he visited Portugal on holiday with his family despite him having been granted asylum in the UK. It is also an opportunity to ask what your MP can do with respect to other issues in the next twelve months.

One of the main issues that will remain ongoing is the need for more effective representation in Parliament. Progress on Sikh issues is one way to judge how effectively you are being represented. The Sikh Network has just launched the largest survey of its kind called the **UK Sikh Survey**. This is a wide-ranging survey that will also determine the extent to which Sikhs are members of political parties, their strength of party identification and how effectively Sikhs feel they are being represented by their MP on Sikh issues.

The Sikh Federation (UK) **is the largest and most prominent campaigning Sikh organisation in the UK that leads on political engagement for the British Sikh community and is of the view** that the vast majority of MPs elected last May, who indicated support for the Sikh Manifesto, have not shown sufficient initiative to date to allow them to point to tangible achievements in the last 12 months. It may equally be true that Sikhs need to increase their political activism and continually lobby MPs on these community-wide issues e.g. when MPs and senior politicians visit local Gurdwaras or attend local functions.

Sikhs have never been truly represented in the corridors of power within the UK. Sikhs comprise around 1% of the population, but we currently have no MPs out of 650. Following boundary changes the overall number of MPs is set to reduce by 50 in 2020 that will make it more difficult to get Sikh MPs unless political parties are far more proactive in nurturing Sikh candidates. In Canada Sikhs comprise around 2% of the population, but 17 of the 338 MPs elected last November were of Sikh origin, including 5 turban wearing Sikhs.

We are also underrepresented in the House of Lords with only three Sikh Lords whereas there are around 22 Jewish, 20 Hindu and 18 Muslim peers. The short term objective must be for the Prime Minister to work with other party leaders to ensure a number of Sikhs, who are recognised within the community are appointed to the House of Lords at the earliest opportunity.

The other issue that will not go away is Sikhs continue to be discriminated at work and in public spaces because of their distinct identity. Sikhs are both an ethnic and a religious group and are protected from racial as well as religious discrimination. We are known for our unique identity and the 5Ks and Sikh Turban (or dastar) are a constant reminder of our duty and therefore need to be understood and welcomed and not feared. A statutory code of practice bringing together existing legal protection and guidance is needed to promote clarity and

consistency across schools, public and government offices and leisure and recreation facilities and to try and reduce discrimination against Sikhs wearing the 5Ks and dastaar.

What you should do:

a) SEND THIS FLYER TO YOUR MP AND ASK HIM OR HER TO:

i) Attend the “Sikh Manifesto: A year on” event on Tuesday 17 May in the Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Westminster between 1-3pm.

ii) Write to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to call for a separate Sikh ethnic tick box in the 2021 Census and ensure the 2017 test questionnaire includes this option in the response to the ethnic question.

It is best to write to the National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, John Pullinger (National.Statistician@statistics.gsi.gov.uk). What the Sikhs are asking for is a minor change in the response to an existing question for which there has been shown to be a demand and there is also precedence to make such changes in the test questionnaire.

More than 40,000 Sikhs ‘protested’ in the 2011 Census by ticking the ‘Other’ category and writing ‘Sikh’. Sikhs were by far the largest group that chose this write in option. ONS has indicated its consultation conducted in the summer of 2015 also showed the demand for a Sikh ethnic tick box.

The ONS is about to enter the next phase of developing and testing questions to ensure that the 2021 Census, that is expected to be the last of its kind, meet as many user requirements as possible. Existing questions are being redeveloped to account for increasing or changing user requirements and new questions introduced where there is a new demand for information. The first major milestone will be the 2017 Census Test, where the newly developed questions will be used on a large scale for the first time and it will help inform the final selection process.

iii) Write to the Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCSM) to help secure a suitable site in central London for a permanent monument to highlight Sikh sacrifices in the First World War.

There is a need for a permanent monument in central London to emphasise Sikh sacrifices in the First World War under the slogan ‘Sikhs: Lions of the Great War’. Prior to the General Election last May virtually every candidate to become an MP from all political parties was supportive of this proposal.

Last month in Parliament the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said he would look at the specific proposals. DCSM should liaise with Westminster City Council, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the new Mayor for London who has indicated his full support for the proposal to draw up a short list of possible sites.

Prominent Sikhs are collectively establishing a Sikh Memorial Trust to take forward the entire project from start to finish, including the funding for the commissioning and installation of the monument. The Trust will write to the Secretary of State to arrange a meeting to discuss the proposal so the project can be completed before the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War on 11 November 2018.

iv) Meet with you and the local Sikh community in the next three months to discuss what they have done in the last 12 months and what they plan to do in the next 12 months.

Issues to discuss include the need for more effective representation in Parliament and actions that can be taken for Sikhs themselves to be truly represented in the Commons and Lords.

As mentioned above, Sikhs continue to be discriminated at work and in public spaces because of their distinct identity. A statutory code of practice bringing together existing legal protection and guidance is needed to promote clarity and consistency across schools, public and government offices and leisure and recreation facilities and to try and reduce discrimination against Sikhs wearing the 5Ks and dastaar.

b) BOOK YOUR PLACE FOR THE “SIKH MANIFESTO: A YEAR ON” EVENT ON TUESDAY 17 MAY IN THE ATTLEE SUITE, PORTCULLIS HOUSE, WESTMINSTER BETWEEN 1-3pm