

# Quarterly

THE SIKH NETWORK  
Responsible for monitoring progress and strategic direction of the Sikh Manifesto

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**The Sikh community continues to make significant progress on issues within the highly acclaimed 10 point Sikh Manifesto. The Sikh Network is also responsible for the UK Sikh Survey and recognised as a representative professional group within government**

## **MPs present evidence of unanimous support from UK Gurdwaras for a census Sikh ethnic tick box**

Members of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs recently met John Pullinger, the National Statistician.



The APPG following a meeting with the Deputy National Statistician in January 2018 agreed to write to around 250 UK Gurdwaras asking them to indicate whether or not they supported the inclusion of a Sikh ethnic tick box in the Census 2021. This was deemed necessary by ONS as one cross-bencher in the House of Lords after official consultation had finished started introducing theological opposition contrary to the legal recognition of Sikhs as an ethnic group as well as a religion.

The Deputy National Statistician suggested if 60% or more of Gurdwaras that responded were in favour this was likely to be sufficient for the Office for National Statistics for its 'public acceptability' test. **All 112 Gurdwaras or 100% that responded to the request by the APPG were in favour of a Sikh ethnic tick box.**

The APPG asked each Gurdwara to complete a return and indicate its official membership and the approximate size of their Sangat (or congregation). Gurdwaras large and small responded from all 12 regions of the UK, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and cover the widest spectrum within the community e.g. Singh Sabha Gurdwaras, Ramgharia Gurdwaras, Bhatra Gurdwaras and Ravidas Gurdwaras. The 112 Gurdwaras, included all the large Gurdwaras and have indicated they have a combined official membership of more than 107,000 Sikhs over the age of 18 and total weekly congregations or Sangat of nearly 470,000.

MPs having presented the evidence are hopeful this will compel the UK Statistics Authority to recommend later this year to the Cabinet Office a Sikh ethnic tick box for the Census White Paper 2018. They have warned legal action accusing the ONS of racial discrimination is inevitable if a Sikh ethnic tick box is overlooked.

## **Central London site identified for Sikh monument and planning underway**



Following months of assessments, discussions and meetings with various public bodies, the Sikh Network working with the National Sikh War Memorial Trust (NSWMT) is delighted to share that following a detailed feasibility study the NSWMT has submitted planning applications for the monument at three prominent sites in central London. The preferred site next to Admiralty Arch which has significance to the Sikh community as the Sikh regiment famously marched through the arches following the victory in the Second World War. The site is also close to Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace and Whitehall. We keenly await the response from the planning authorities so next steps can be announced.

## **Lions of the Great War monument in Smethwick**

A 10ft high bronze statue of a First World War Sikh soldier, named the 'The Lions of the Great War' monument project led by Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Smethwick and supported by the Sikh Network, is to be erected outside the Gurdwara to commemorate the sacrifices by Sikh soldiers in the First World War.



Black Country sculptor Luke Perry is creating the memorial which will be unveiled in time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War on 11 November 2018. The statue will stand on a six-foot plinth with inscriptions that name the regiments in which soldiers served.

The total cost of the project is estimated at £175,000 with the cost of the statue being met by Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick and a grant of £145,000 from Sandwell Council to create a paved public area for the statue. The generous contribution of over 80% from Sandwell Council has been directly raised with Lord Bourne at MHCLG to indicate the contribution to the National War Memorial from central government needs to be at least 50%.

## **Demand grows for independent public inquiry as judge orders declassification of secret papers**

Following a three-day hearing in London in March Judge Murray Shanks ordered in June that the Cabinet Office must declassify secret papers relating to the events of 1984. The legal ruling came after journalist Phil Miller, who first exposed the SAS role, made a Freedom of Information (FOI) request at the end of 2014 for four Cabinet Office files from the period, that were being withheld from the National Archives.



The Sikh Federation (UK) provided direct evidence for the tribunal and made robust public interest arguments during the hearing that have been recognised in the ruling. The judgement states: "We accept the strength of feeling in the Sikh community in the UK and beyond about the "Amritsar massacre"

and its aftermath and any role the UK government may have played in it." In what will be seen as support for further disclosures the tribunal concluded there was "a very high public interest in disclosure of the withheld information".

Journalist Phil Miller's detailed report [Sacrificing Sikhs - the need for an investigation](#), commissioned by the Sikh Federation (UK), was considered by the three-person tribunal. In what is seen as a crucial development for an independent public inquiry the judge specifically criticised the Heywood review stating "we also acknowledge the limitations of the Heywood review . . . in particular the speed with which it was carried out and the limited time period of the files that were looked at".

In a further twist the judgement officially reveals Owen Jenkins, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Director for South Asia and Afghanistan admitted when giving evidence that the UK government took the unusual "step of letting the Indian government have an advance copy of the Heywood review" before it was presented to Parliament.

## 1984 Sikh Genocide Book of Remembrance signed by over 100 MPs in Parliament



The Sikh Network, Sikh Federation (UK) and the APPG for British Sikhs hosted a Remembrance Week in Parliament to remember all those killed and injured in the June 1984 Sikh Genocide.

The Sikh community marked the 34th anniversary with an annual protest march through central London and a freedom rally in Trafalgar Square attended by tens of thousands of Sikhs.

Preet Kaur Kill MP, the Chair of the APPG for British Sikhs wrote to all MPs and placed a Book of Remembrance in Parliament for MPs to sign and leave personal messages of support and sympathy.

Jas Singh of the Sikh Network said: *“This year we wanted to raise the profile of the June 1984 Sikh Genocide with Parliamentarians, especially given the UK governments role in the attack and subsequent anti-Sikh measures in the 80’s, something we are pursuing to expose via an independent public inquiry. Many communities mark atrocities committed by oppressive states in Parliament, and we felt it appropriate to do the same for the June 1984 Sikh Genocide.”*

*“We were delighted over 100 MPs, from all the main political parties supported the campaign by signing the Remembrance Book, including the leader of the Opposition who reiterated his support for an independent public inquiry.”*



## Quarterly roundtable meeting with Government

At the quarterly government roundtable meeting with Sikh organisations chaired by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Sikh Network, together with other leading organisation pressurised the government for the inclusion and open discussion of the recent Afghan Sikh Issue, something the department was reluctant to add to the agenda or discuss.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 a terror attack by IS in Jalalabad killed 19 Sikhs including MP elect Awatar Singh Khalsa and many of the Afghan Sikh leadership. Sikhs around the world condemned the cowardly attack and raised concerns about the plight of the now dwindling Sikh minority. However the lack of recognition or condolence offered by the FCO was not lost on the UK Sikh community as well as inappropriate treatment of Afghan refugees by the Home Office.

The need for a substantial financial commitment by MHCLG to the National Sikh War Memorial was raised and an update provided on progress with the Statutory Code of Practice for the 5 Kakaars and Sikh turban. Other important matters included grass roots community engagement to discuss and research grooming of Sikh girls. It was agreed a meeting in Birmingham will be arranged via MHCLG and the Sikh Network. We also requested and agreed for an end to end process workshop with the Home Office to walkthrough hate crime reporting and the processing of crimes reported.

## Leading Sikh minds discuss the ‘State of the Panth’



A seminar at the Sikh Missionary Society UK to discuss “The State of the Panth: Learning from experience” was held on 14 July, 2018. The lead speaker was Gurmukh Singh OBE, followed by Dabinderjit Singh OBE, Justice Anup Singh Choudhri, Jagir

Kaur Sekhon OBE, Harmander Singh of Sikhs in England, and some others representing diverse experience in Sikh activism. The event was chaired by Gurmukh Singh OBE a Sikh Network board member. Criteria for

representing Sikhs, the current landscape, lessons learnt, milestones achieved and the challenges ahead were the main topics discussed.

## Sikh Network address National Interfaith Forum

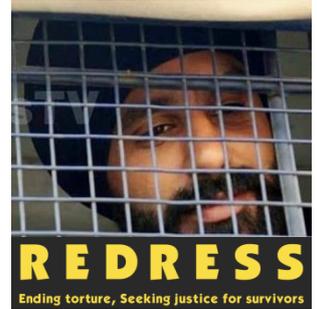
Jaspreet Singh participated and presented his views in the interfaith events organised by the National Interfaith Network and Faith and Belief forum. In the event by the Faith and Belief Forum as alumni of the UN award winning ParliaMentors Programme he stressed that there should be a dialogue in the faith communities especially around how they can repair their relations to enable youngsters to live in a respectable and informed society. He also highlighted how racism has played a bad role in limiting the faith to just private life. In the National Interfaith Network as a representative from the British Organisation of Sikh Students he argued why knowledge of different faith needs to be decolonised and how moving forward the colonial institutions and people need to accept faiths as they are without looking at faith communities through the colonial lens/knowledge.



## Meeting at UN to discuss killing of Sikh activist in Indian judicial custody and case of Jagtar Singh Johal

Sikh representatives met staff in Geneva at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The meeting on 4 May called for action against India for the killing of Harminder Singh, a well know Sikh activist and freedom fighter, while in judicial custody in Patiala jail on 18 April 2018.

Harminder Singh was deported from Thailand to India in November 2014 where he had been tortured and abused while in custody. Although it has been reported he suffered cardiac arrest many have raised concerns and expressed doubts about the circumstances in which he died and the denial of basic medical facilities that he raised with his family prior to his death.



Family members of Jagtar Singh Johal, the 31- year old from Dumbarton who has been in custody for over 9 months having been abducted on 4 November 2017 travelled from the UK to take part in the meeting and a protest rally outside the UN offices in Geneva.

The Sikh delegation that met OHCHR staff included the brother and aunt of Jagtar Singh Johal. Clarifications and assurances were provided about actions being taken by the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment since REDRESS filed an [urgent appeal](#) in December 2017. The strongly worded joint letter from three special rapporteurs has now been made public.

## Sikhs discuss relationship and narrative of mainstream media on key issues



The APPG for British Sikhs and the Sikh Network hosted an event in Parliament ‘Sikhs and the Media – Reclaiming the Narrative’ following a number of mainstream media outlets covering Sikh issues in a negative was and from a

misinformed position. Special guest speaker Dr Jasjit Singh, author of ‘The idea, context, framing and realities of ‘Sikh radicalisation’ in Britain’ presented his official findings on how the Sikhs had been victims of media propaganda and demonization to suite political agendas in the 1980’s, much of which was also forming the standard narrative today.

Sikh Network board member Dabinderjit Singh OBE also covered recent incidents how the media had misrepresented the facts and highlighted their ignorance or lazy journalism on understanding the Sikh Faith. The event which was very well attended by the media and experts in religious literacy highlighted the need for better outreach to respected and knowledgeable Sikh organisations for briefings and comments, either direct or via the Sikh Press Association, instead of publishing controversial individuals with little or no connection to Sikh affairs, institutions or the grass root community.