

Sikh Summit Report 2014



UNITED
SIKHS

Recognize the Human Race as One

ISSUED BY:

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ABOUT UNITED SIKHS & INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY (ICHRA)

UNITED SIKHS is a UN-affiliated, international non-profit, non-governmental, humanitarian relief, human development and advocacy organization, aimed at empowering those in need, especially disadvantaged and minority communities across the world. UNITED SIKHS is a grass-roots organization with chapters in America, Asia and Europe that pursue projects for the spiritual, social and economic empowerment of underprivileged and minority communities. Our mission is to transform underprivileged and minority communities and individuals into informed and vibrant members of society through civic, educational and personal development programs, by fostering active participation in social and economic activity.

The International Civil and Human Rights Advocacy (ICHRA) project helps advance the economic, social and spiritual empowerment of minorities and other marginalized groups and individuals in need, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social status, age or ability. We achieve this by protecting and enforcing the civil and human rights of minorities and marginalized groups in the Americas, Europe and Asia. The following sub projects are part of the ICHRA project: Civil and Human Rights Awareness and Advocacy, Hate Crimes, Racial Profiling, Minorities and Indigenous Rights, Right to Turban, Rights Under The Criminal Justice System (e.g. rights of prisoners and victims), Sikh Civil Rights Conference and the Sikh Summit.

ABOUT THE SIKH SUMMIT

Sikhs in United States can be traced back nearly 100 years when they came to California to work on the railroads. However, in the past and still ongoing, Sikhs have faced biased treatment, racism and xenophobia despite the fact that many in the community proudly identify themselves as Americans. The problem has been compounded by media coverage, policies and general public attitudes toward immigrants, and in particular, those who have a distinct external appearance post the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

As a civil and human rights advocacy organization, UNITED SIKHS organizes a yearly Sikh Summit for Sikhs across the country to unite and hold meaningful dialogue with their local and national lawmakers and to promote solutions on important Sikh civil and human rights issues.

Sikh Summit 2014



From July 28-30, 2014, UNITED SIKHS held its 6th Annual Sikh Summit in Washington DC to meet congressmen, government agencies, and NGOs to discuss Sikh issues around the world, including:

- Addressing the rise in hate crimes committed across the country
- Halting the continued introduction of hair sampling bills by U.S. Congress members
- Counting Sikhs as a distinct group in the U.S. Census
- Allowing Sikhs to serve in the U.S. Military
- Reversing the ongoing turban ban in Belgium and France
- Justice for victims of the Sikh Massacre of 1984

Meetings were held with:

- United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
- United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division (DOJ-CR)
- United States Department of Justice, Community Relations Service (DOJ-CRS)
- United States Department of State (DOS)
- United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- Congressmen from Texas, Arizona, Michigan, California, New York, Wisconsin, Nevada (including members of the American Sikh

Congressional Caucus, International Religious Freedom Caucus and the Armed Services Committee)

- Senators from Michigan, Missouri, Florida, North Dakota, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Delaware, Alaska, and Wyoming

Community members who attended the summit made history by meetings with Representatives and Senators from districts and states with small Sikh populations, than those more commonly resided by Sikhs. By doing so, Representatives and Senators who had never heard of Sikhism or our concerns, were educated on the tenets of the Sikh faith, its beautiful values, and post- 9/11 backlash.

Our concerns were met with understanding and agreement on the issues we brought up. In particular, commitments were made to assist UNITED SIKHS as we bring awareness in communities about the Sikh faith, in order to combat the ignorance which sparks many hate crimes and discrimination Sikhs face.

Sikhs in the Military

Sikhs continue to fight for their right to serve in the U.S. armed forces, and UNITED SIKHS legal team is helping them to the fullest possible extent. We are currently representing a couple of young Sikhs in their religious accommodation requests before the Department of the Army. The revision to the army regulations made earlier this year do not provide for any substantive relief. They merely establish a procedure for applying for religious accommodation and give complete discretion to the army to accept, or reject the request. In fact, there hasn't been a single reported case of acceptance since the regulations were revised.

One of our young advocates met with several Senators and Representatives on the Armed Services committee to discuss his personal story and struggle to join his university's ROTC program. The story was met with empathy and understanding that one should not be put in a position to choose between their faith and country.

Sikhs in the U.S. Census

Amongst those issues was the need for Sikhs to be counted as a separate category within the U.S. Census. As Sikhs, we have been victims of discrimination, hate crimes, profiling, and bullying, but how many of us are victims? In order for us to adequately advocate for ourselves, we need to know how many of us reside in the United States so we know the percentages and ratios important for such advocacy work. As it stands, we don't have those numbers. Some Sikh organizations will say 500,000 Sikhs live in this country, while others say one million. We have no way of knowing for sure until we are counted in the Census.

UNITED SIKHS worked tirelessly on this issue in previous years, in hopes of change for the 2010 Census. We successfully began a [campaign to inform Sikhs to check](#)

["OTHER" and write in "Sikh"](#) on their Census forms. To read our detailed report on Sikhs in the United States Census, please [click here](#).

With the 2020 Census in mind, we have vigorously engaged with officials involved with the United States Census to gauge what steps we can take to move this issue forth. We had extensive conversations with key individuals, such as: Congressman Frank Wolf's office, The Census Project Stakeholders, the Director of Census and Voting Programs for Asian Americans Advancing Justice. Through those interactions, there was general consensus: Reach out in numbers to the relevant Congressmen who have experience, ties, and pull within the Census Bureau.

At the Summit we did just that; we discussed the need for Sikhs to be counted as a separate category within the [U.S. Census](#) so we know the accurate number of Sikhs residing in the United States and can use those numbers to further our advocacy efforts. With the 2020 Census in mind, we vigorously gained commitments from key members of Congress who work on Census issues.

Hair Sampling Bills

The issue of [proposed hair sampling bills](#) was also brought to the attention of Department of Justice officials, Representatives, and Senators. In particular, we met with co-sponsors of the bill to educate them on the importance of unshorn hair to the Sikh faith and how the bill would allow employers to force a Sikh operator to provide a hair sample thereby preventing Sikhs from seeking employment as operators due to their inability to cut their hair for any purpose. Their response was universally of understanding that an exemption for religious purposes should be included.

During our meetings with the USCIRF and DOS, we raised concerns faced by our international Sikh community, including the ongoing turban ban in Belgium and France, including critical international Sikh issues in the DOS Annual Report, and obtaining justice for victims of the Sikh Massacre of 1984.

Community members also had the opportunity to speak to DHS TSA officials about the high rate of Sikh profiling conducted in airports. TSA officials were also informed of the insensitive nature of secondary screenings.

Overall, our community members, Academy students, and staff were able to inform and bring awareness to many different agencies and members of the House of Representatives and Senate.

To view pictures, please click [here](#)

Innovative Justice Banquet



On July 26th, 2014 we held our Innovative Justice Banquet followed by our Gala with Gatka and singing performances, including by Rabbi Shergill. The Banquet celebrated the creative and distinct work of individuals in our community, along with allies in our human and civil rights advocacy efforts. The Gala was held to raise funds for a Drug Deaddiction Hospital in Punjab.

Banquet Honorees and Speakers from the civil rights advocacy community included:

- Eric Treene: Special Counsel for Religious Discrimination in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice has given numerous presentations on the First Amendment, religious freedom and religious discrimination in employment, public accommodations, public facilities, education and housing. He also oversees the DOJ's efforts in protecting Sikhs, Muslims and other Asian/Arab Americans from any religious based discrimination.
- Lexer Quamie: Counsel in the Public Policy Department of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, where she helps facilitate the development of a federal policy agenda for a broad coalition of civil and human rights groups and analyzes federal current civil rights issues and legislation in the areas of Transportation Equity, Workers' Rights, Equal Opportunity, and Criminal Justice. Prior to joining The Leadership Conference, Ms. Quamie was a Policy Analyst with the Center for Law and Social Policy. Ms. Quamie has also practiced employment litigation with the international law firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, and was a clerk for the Chief Judge of the Eastern District of Virginia, the Honorable James Spencer.

- Harleen Kaur: Civil Rights/Liberties Policy Advisor in the Office of Civil Rights and Liberties at the Transportation Security Administration. She has worked there for more than six years now on a variety of subjects, including drafting the TSA limited English Proficiency Plan, drafting and reviewing various trainings, review of policy and procedure, and working with public stakeholder and advocacy groups like UNITED SIKHS.
- Brian Bachman: U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom office's Acting Director. He has been a career foreign service officer for twenty-four years and served in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Cambodia and Afghanistan. Earlier this year he attended the 5th Global Sikh Civil and Human Rights Report releasing and spoke on his beliefs that religious freedom is at the foundation of this nation.

Banquet Honorees and Speakers from the Sikh community included:

- Rabbi Shergill: Indian musician & a human rights activist known most for his hit song Bulla Ki Jaana, in 2005. His music style ranges from classical Punjabi or "sufi-style" to rock music. His other hit songs include "Dilli" from the Bollywood film, Delhii Heights and also "Challa" from Yash Chopra's movie titled, Jab Tak Hai Jaan.
- Nav Bhatia: Owner of both Mississauga Hyundai and Rexdale Hyundai, is one of the most recognizable faces in Toronto. Starting in Canada as a sales person Nav's hard work and passion to succeed progressed his career path to Owner of two very successful Car Dealerships. Nav's biggest accomplishment is perhaps using his passion for basketball, particularly for the NBA's Toronto Raptors, to create a common ground with people of all backgrounds - giving him the platform to break down stereotypes and educate others on what the Sikh Community is about. Nav has not missed one Raptor's game in 20 years and was recently appointed by the NBA team as the official Raptor's South Asian Community Ambassador.
- J.J. Singh: Honorary graduate from Harvard Business school, J.J. Singh now works as the economic advisor to U.S. Senator Coons. J.J. Singh has done work with the Peace Corps and was also a Credit Analyst at the White House office of Management and Budget, where he assessed the cost, impact and viability of U.S. government loans and for the president. As a Sikh he has done great work and will remain an inspiration to Sikhs around the nation.
- Mayor Satyendra Singh Huja: As the only Sikh resident of his town, Mr. Huja is the mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia since January 2012. Prior to be elected mayor, he served two terms on the Charlottesville City Council. He is also a professor at the University of Virginia School of Agriculture
- Suneet Singh Tulli: Man behind the worlds cheapest tablet, called the Aakash. As the CEO of DataWind, Forbes named Suneet Tuli one of the Impact 15 list of "classroom revolutionaries" who are using technology to advance learning in the classroom.

- Dr. Rahuldeep Gill Singh: Professor of Religion at Cal Lutheran University. He teaches topics such as global religions, Indian thought, Christianity and also studies the interaction between Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. He also teaches a yearly class on the Sikh religion and tradition.
- Vipp Jaswal: Joined the FOX News Channel in 2005 and has since been the head of International Development and Business. Mr. Jaswal has successfully executed strategic plans and missions on an international level. He also has his own radio talk show called the "Vipp Jaswal Report".
- Chaz Singh: Labor Local Councillor for Plymouth's Drake Ward (United Kingdom), and previously served as Deputy Lord Mayor. He was recently the runner up in the elections for the next Labour Parliamentary Candidate for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport. He is now running for Labour Parliamentary Candidate for South West Devon. Along with this, Chaz Singh is the man who simply held up a hand written letter "T" in front of the "Urban Outfitters" shop to create a image that read "Turban Outfitters." Chaz Singh is one that is very proud of being Sikh and his "Turban Outfitters" picture has been shared thousands of times online and in his words have "humanized" the turban in many people's eyes.



Also present were representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice, US. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of , National Council of Asian Pacific- Americans, National Sikh Campaign, Hindu American Foundation, The Leadership Conference of Civil and Human Rights, and many more.

Advocacy and Humanitarian Aid Academy



From July 22-25, 2014 we held our First Advocacy and Humanitarian Aid Academy in Washington, DC. AHAA was a training program designed for students and young professionals 17 and older looking to get involved in social justice advocacy for the Sikh community, relief aid work, or education and healthcare initiatives promoted and pursued by UNITED SIKHS. This comprehensive training program featured workshops conducted by qualified speakers including acclaimed professors, government officials, and advocates.

This year we accepted nine outstanding, diversely qualified young leaders for this program. Chosen applicants had the opportunity to hear from speakers, visit congressmen on Capitol Hill, and tour monumental sites within Washington, DC.

Through completion of AHAA training, Academy graduates received certification, training materials, and the skills necessary to fulfill paths in advocacy, law, policy, healthcare, education, and humanitarian aid.

We are humbled to announce that we received an overwhelming response from the youth globally who applied to take a spot in our Academy.

AHAA's extensive four-day training program included discussions from panels, interactive workshops, tours of federal buildings, lectures, and skill-building exercises. Along with members of the UNITED SIKHS team, presenters from around the United States will be coming to the nation's capitol to train these young minds.

Trainers and Topics included:

- "Sikh History in the United States" presented by Christopher Murray (Teacher for class on religious tolerance and comparative religions where he uses Sikhism as prime examples on the topic. Mr. Murray has received the Teacher of the Year award for Excellence in Diversity Education)
- "DOJ, Civil Rights Division processes to work on Civil Rights/ Sikh issues" presented by Eric Treene, (Special Counsel for Religious Discrimination in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice)
- "National Sikh Campaign: New Initiative and how to get involved" presented by Gurwin Ahuja (Policy advocate for Generation Progress at the Center for American)
- "NAACP Legislative Update" presented by Hilary Shelton (director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Policy)
- "Creating Positive Sikh Perceptions in the Mainstream Media" presented by Gurpreet Singh Sarin (American Idol's first Sikh Candidate who made it into the top 40 contestants in the 12th season of American Idol)
- "The Sikh Movement: What is Sikhi Really?" and "Flipping the Gurudwara Workshop" presented by Dr. Rahuldeep Gill (Professor of Religion at California Lutheran University. He studies the interaction between Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus and teaches a yearly class on the Sikh religion and tradition).



In addition, students visited the Beyond Bollywood exhibit in the Natural History Museum, where they learned about Sikh immigration history, the first Sikh basketball player, Sikh professions, the first Sikh congressman, and post 9/11 backlash. Students also had the opportunity to attend our Innovative Justice Banquet and Fundraising Gala, and Summit meetings with congressmen, Senators, and government officials.

Our graduates left the Academy as well-rounded and passionate advocates, humanitarians, and activists with developed missions and goals to assist our organization and the Sikh community going forth. **For pictures, please click [here](#).**

Testimonials:

Amolak Singh Kahlon:

The UNITED SIKHS Academy and Summit were **two of the most engaging and rewarding experiences of my life**. I never imagined that I would meet so many professionals working in law, the federal government, and advocacy in such a short period of time. The skills we learned in the academy, such as how to discuss issues with congressmen and leadership skills are vital to all aspects of life. The training we received during the Academy was utilized perfectly during the Summit, as we discussed Sikh issues with several congressmen, including Paul Ryan. I greatly enjoyed learning a plethora of information and spending time in the nation's capital over the last few weeks. **The Academy/Summit are tremendous opportunities that should not be passed up**, especially for someone who's interested in law, politics or advocacy. **I can't wait to continue having these conversations with government officials and attend both of them as an alumni next summer!**

Navneet Kaur Plaha:

The UNITED SIKHS' Summit is the most amazing experience of my life. I got an inside look at how Washington, DC works. I never thought that I would be able to meet and speak with Senators before. The academy was also a very enlightening experience. We got to meet with Sikhs from all over that were trying to make a difference for our community. It was very empowering to hear them tell me how they are trying to help our community; **they made me realize that I could make a difference too.**

Yashmeet Kaur:

From day one, we were exposed to Influential political leaders. I gained invaluable experiences throughout both the academy and summit. From advocacy and humanitarian aid training to resume and career building workshops, the Academy held a variety of informational and interactive sessions. Participating in the Sikh Summit gave me the opportunity to meet Congressmen, Senators, and other prominent leaders to discuss the major issues Sikhs face and to make them aware of arising policies that would be specifically discriminatory towards our community. **I would highly recommend this program without any reservation**, to every Sikh that hopes to make a change for the betterment of our community.

Sahiba Kaur:

The Advocacy and Humanitarian Aid Academy, or as we like to call it "AHAA", was an experience I will never forget. **The skills we gained throughout the Academy not only prepared us for being proper advocates, but also helped us become more confident in the professional world.** The Academy also trained us perfectly for the Sikh summit, in which we imbibed all these skills to present issues facing the Sikh community to senators and congressman. I recommend this academy to all who would like to become advocates of the Sikh faith, and especially for the individuals who are interested in law, policy, and working for the federal government. **The academy and summit are opportunities that no one should pass up** and the experience gained

has taught us to become more confident in all aspects of life. I am extremely proud to be an academy graduate and excited to come back next year as an AHAA alumnus.

Sharon Kaur Sidhu:

The 2014 Sikh Awareness Academy **was the highlight of my summer.** Not only did I learn so much about my religion and community, but I also made eight new friends. The workshops were very informative and well rounded. We had the opportunity to hear from people who are very successful in their field of work and gave us guidance as to how we can achieve success in our own futures. I would highly recommend this workshop to everyone, not only Sikhs. **It's a very rewarding experience and if I could, I would do it again next year.**

Manveer Singh Reehal:

UNITED SIKHS' Academy was a once in a lifetime experience that opened up a myriad of opportunities for me. The academy was an incredible learning experience, as well as a practical workshop that helped lay the groundwork for advocacy and aid not only for Sikhs but for the entirety of the human race. The word "academy" may have a boring connotation but the experience was anything but boring. I had an amazing time learning and getting to know my community with other students from the United States and Canada. **The speakers expressed ideas and knowledge that kept my attention and motivated me to do the kind of work they did, and even more.** Our chaperons/leaders were funny and extremely influential in a professional yet friendly way. I have made friendships that I will keep for the rest of my life, and memories that make me want to do this again. I urge new students to join this academy next summer and have this once in a lifetime experience.

Jasmine Kaur Plaha:

I feel that the time I spent at the UNITED SIKHS Academy **provided me with information that benefits my overall knowledge of my religion, the prejudice the people of my race face, and different opportunities I could have in my future** if I am willing to help others who need aid in my country and around the world. I really enjoyed learning about our struggles in history (ex: 1984) and what we as citizens of first world countries are doing to obtain equality whilst aiding others who are struggling. It was impressive to see how many speakers were able to come in daily to educate us on their political standings, organizations, and personal educational life. **Like a sponge, I soaked up all the information I was provided with that applied to my life back home,** and I really hope to be a part of this exciting opportunity that the UNITED SIKHS Academy gave me once again next year.

Iknoor Singh:

The 2014 Sikh Awareness Academy truly inspired me do things I would never have dreamed of doing before. Speakers ranging from Department of Justice Officials to Executive Directors of the National Sikh Campaign to Professors gave way to inspire the Sikh Youth. Most of the ideas brainstormed were of things we would have never have imagined to do by ourselves. Professor Gill encouraged us to use the Gurdwara as a means of doing seva for the outside community, while Gurwin Ahuja provided us

with ideas to change the perception of Sikhs around the Nation through media. **I came out of the Academy as a refreshed outside-the-box thinker, energized to make a difference.** The chaperones were absolutely amazing being with us step by step but providing the necessary freedom as well. Ranjit and Anisha Singh truly motivated me to step outside of my comfort zone and make a difference. I am sincerely thankful for the academies participants and supervisors. I encourage all Sikh youth to attend to make great friendships and pioneer the path for future Sikhs.

Hargun Kaur Sidhu:

I really enjoyed hearing about the presenters' professional and community service experiences because it encouraged me to be creative in my approach to addressing the issues that matter most to me. Another very helpful aspect of the presentations was that the speakers shared ideas regarding how we could get involved in our specific areas of interest. After having the opportunity to network with them, **I realized how fortunate I was to build connections with people who share my passions and can provide me with guidance, support and access to many opportunities in the future.** Attending the Academy was a great way to explore various professional and humanitarian fields. It taught me about the most pressing issues that the Sikh community faces today, and showed me what I can do about them. As a result, **I now have a much clearer vision of what I want to do in the future in order to serve the community on both a local and an international level.** I am also very grateful to have made some great friends and memories throughout this experience. It exceeded all of my expectations and I would definitely recommend it to other students in the future!



PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK

For UNITED SIKHS to continue its advocacy efforts and host our annual summits, we need your support and assistance. Please click here to [donate](#) online today.