



UNITED SIKHS

12TH ANNUAL SUMMIT AND ADVOCACY & HUMANITARIAN AID (AHAA) ACADEMY REPORT

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY (ICHRA)

AUGUST 29, 2023

NEW YORK CITY

I. BRIEF HISTORY

UNITED SIKHS, founded in 1999 in New York City, had its humble beginnings in Queens, New York where a group of dedicated Sikhs took the initiative to empower and advocate for Sikh taxi drivers and new immigrants.

Today, UNITED SIKHS has grown into the largest Humanitarian and Civil Rights Organization operating in the United States, Europe, and Asia, serving Sikhs and several other populations. An affiliate of the United Nations Dept. of Public Info, UNITED SIKHS operates humanitarian missions and civil rights advocacy across three continents including recent conflict-affected regions of Ukraine.

At the core of UNITED SIKHS, there are three key programs: the International Civil & Human Rights Advocacy (ICHRA), the Community Education & Empowerment Directorate (CEED), and the SIKHAID initiative. These programs, combined with the unwavering dedication of volunteers and supporters, have positioned UNITED SIKHS as a distinctive non-governmental global organization with an international presence and affiliation with the United Nations. The organization is committed to providing advocacy, humanitarian aid, and tools for empowerment and education to minority communities worldwide, without regard to race, gender, gender orientation, ability, creed, or religion.

UNITED SIKHS strives to instill hope in those affected by both man-made and natural disasters. We lend voices to those who are disenfranchised, working diligently to improve the quality of life for members of diverse communities.

UNITED SIKHS stands as a shining example of collective action and the transformative power of community support. Our ongoing endeavors continue to make a profound difference in the lives of those we serve, embodying the principles of compassion, advocacy, and empowerment.

II. UNITED SIKHS SUMMIT AND AHAA ACADEMY THEME AND GOAL

The theme of the 2023 Sikhs Summit is "Promoting Global Understanding and Interfaith Dialogue."



The summit aims to foster dialogue and cooperation between different religious and cultural communities, highlighting the Sikh faith's principles of equality, tolerance, and social justice. The goal of the Summit is to bring Sikh youth together. It is to empower, educate, and create an alliance of future leaders through various topics and collaborative discussions. The knowledge gained from

the dignitaries who spoke at the Summit will allow Sikh youth to better understand ways they can be involved in the community and potential paths that will allow them to make a difference as knowledgeable leaders of the future.

This year's Sikhs Summit was held **10th - 14th of July 2023**. The five-day event took place in a hybrid format. Twin event of the Summit, AHAA is designed for those who are passionate about law, policy, civil rights advocacy, healthcare & education, international humanitarian aid work in disaster and conflict zones, and all kinds of social justice causes. The rigorous training program arms participants with the requisite skills, resources, and knowledge to pursue careers in these areas, transforming their passion into an abiding commitment.

Consisting of lectures, discussions, workshops, interactive panels, and skill-building exercises, AHAA provides the selected students with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to listen to and interact with acclaimed civil rights advocates, highest federal government agency officials, representatives of reputable civil rights organizations, professors, UNITED SIKHS leadership, and ranking members

of the U.S. Congress. Additionally, they are made aware of the major issues faced globally by Sikhs and taught ways to empower the community. At the end of the academy, AHAA Academy bestows upon the students a certificate of completion. Select students will be retained in the form of volunteers and internships at UNITED SIKHS through continued mentorship and coaching.

III. DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS SPOTLIGHT

A long friend and ally of the Sikh community, honorable *Congresswoman Judy Chu* addressed the Summit and the AHAA Academy on the legislative priorities she has been working on. She shared her long-standing belief in equality, fairness, and a world free from discrimination that minority groups continue to experience. She also shared her strong belief that Sikh Americans should have unwavering constitutional Freedom of Speech to influence the conversation about equality and democracy in their homeland of Punjab. She shared with the participants the legislative priorities that she is focusing on during her tenure. She commended the UNITED SIKHS for its leadership in spearheading the advocacy efforts in the diaspora and abroad.



Congresswoman Judy Chu

A highly respected and accomplished Ambassador At Large, *Ambassador Rashad Hussain* was an



Ambassador-At-Large Rashad Hussain

ideal candidate to address participants of the Summit and the Academy. Ambassador Hussain serves as principal advisor to the Secretary and advisor to President Biden on Religious Freedom conditions and policy. He leads the Department's efforts to monitor religious freedom abuses, persecution, and

discrimination worldwide. He also oversees policies and programs to address these concerns and works to build diverse and dynamic partnerships with the broadest range of civil society, with equitable and meaningful inclusion of faith actors globally. He brought world-renowned insights and expertise in matters of international relations, diplomacy, and religious freedom. His unique perspective on interfaith relations, global affairs, and the significance of religious tolerance undoubtedly contributed significantly to the overall success of the event and inspired attendees.

Ms. Dena King was appointed by President Joe Biden as the US Attorney For The Western District Of North Carolina. She is one of the leaders of the Justice Department's "United Against Hate" initiative, which UNITED SIKHS had the honor of attending and interacting with during the meeting held at the Gurdwara Khalsa Darbar, the Sikh faith center in Charlotte in February of 2023. Our Summit's Distinguished Speaker, Ms. King addressed the participants of the Summit on the subject of the "DoJ's role in tackling hate crimes and the recently announced "United Against Hate" Initiative." Her unique perspective and leadership were visible as she inspired and educated the Summit students, which undoubtedly enhanced the level of discourse on the issue of hate crimes and fostered meaningful conversations that will lead to positive change.



United States Attorney Ms. Dena J. King

Mindy E. Weinstein is the Director of the EEOC's Washington Field Office, where she is responsible for overseeing investigations, mediations, federal sector hearings, and the office's outreach and education program in Washington, DC and Northern Virginia. Ms. Weinstein's prior experience includes serving as the EEOC's Regional Attorney in Charlotte, North Carolina; as a



*Mindy E. Weinstein, Director EEOC's
Washington Field Office*

Special Assistant to former EEOC Chair Evan Kemp, and later to former EEOC Vice Chair Leslie E. Silverman; as an attorney in the EEOC Office of General Counsel's Systemic Litigation Program; and as a trial attorney in EEOC's Baltimore office. She also previously served as a Special Assistant United States Attorney in Washington, D.C. Drawing on her experience, Ms. Weinstein presented overwhelming data and institutional resources helpful for the Sikhs community to utilize and navigate

in fighting employment discrimination. Students of the Summit and AHAA Academy obtained basic skills required to understand the operational procedure of EEOC.

Kiran Kaur, SALDEF Executive Director, spoke on “the accountability of Giant Social Media Platforms and Censorship of Sikh Voices.” This session was significantly important as the voices of Sikh advocacy continue to be blocked in India. Ms. Kaur shared her vast expertise with the Summit participants and provided tools and tips for strategic advocacy for Sikhs' Free Speech. UNITED SIKHS is humbled by the continued institutional collaboration and the unity of purpose that our two



Kiran Kaur, SALDEF, Washington D.C.

institutions continue to cultivate for the best result for the Sikhs nation.

Project Manager of UNITED SIKHS in Pakistan, **Mr. Mahindarpal Singh**, and his colleague Mr. Harjeet Singh, residents of Nankana Sahib Pakistan, spoke at the Summit by presenting evidence of security threats that Sikh citizens face in Pakistan. Recently, the targeted killing of Sikhs in Pakistan

by non-state actors has become pervasive in the region. The session sought to steer a meaningful conversation for the United States Foreign Policy practitioners to understand the discrete nature of



*Mahinderpal Singh, UNITED SIKHS
Project Manager in Punjab, Pakistan*

security breaches and existential threats the Sikhs in Pakistan are facing. The goal is to continue to press the government agencies and relevant US commissions to take necessary policy and legislative steps to safeguard the Sikh community in Pakistan. Mr. Mahinderpal Singh, who is the first Pakistani Sikh cricketer to play at a national level and received the prestigious award of Pride of Pakistan Given by the Government of Pakistan 2021, continues to oversee the UNITED SIKHS human rights project

in Pakistan.

Our own *Attorney Simran Kasuri* from Kasuri Law Firm in New York and New Jersey presented about the US Immigration Law and Policy. This session aimed to offer attendees a balanced and informative understanding of the complex field of immigration law. Dwelling on her daily practical experience, Attorney Kasuri shed light on the processes and procedures that immigrant communities need to meet during status adjustments. During her presentation on US immigration law and policy, Attorney Kasuri provided a comprehensive overview of the subject. She discussed the intricate nature of the immigration system and its profound impact on individuals. The presentation covered a range of topics,



*Attorney Simran Kasuri, Kasuri Law
Firm, New York*

including the various types of visas available, the distinction between temporary and permanent visas, and the qualifications required for foreign nationals to obtain them. She also explained the process of obtaining a green card, a significant step towards permanent residency. She addressed the evolving landscape of refugee and asylum law, highlighting recent changes and challenges. Additionally, she touched upon common barriers to US citizenship and the rights that non-immigrants possess while residing in the US. Attorney Simran Kasuri is admitted in New York, New Jersey, E.D.N.Y, and S.D.N.Y.

Dr. Iqtidar Cheema, currently the Director of the Institute for Leadership and Community



Dr. Iqtidar Cheema

Development in Birmingham, England addressed the Summit on the challenges to the religious liberty of the Sikh community in Pakistan and India. An internationally acclaimed expert with the publication of numerous books and scholarly journal articles published on a range of legal, political, and historical topics pertaining to South Asia and the Indian subcontinent, Dr. Cheema brought to the summit an elevated paradigm of understanding the

issue of Sikhs' liberty in the region. Dr. Cheema's works have been cited by UNHCR and the World Bank in their reports. Dr. Cheema testified in front of the United States Congress on three occasions as an expert witness. Currently, he is on the United Nations Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide and Atrocity Crimes.

Dr. Gurbachan brought to the Summit his lived and research experiences on the topic of global warming, refugee influx, and conflict in the Horn of Africa. With over 20 million people in the Horn of Africa region vulnerable to man-made and natural disasters, the region has become more

volatile and susceptible than ever before. With the purpose of evaluating the humanitarian need on the ground, UNITED SIKHS designed a session during the Summit to invite Chapter leaders in Africa to provide updates and educate our participants on the recent developments in the region. Dr.



*Dr. Gurbachan Singh Benawara,
Nairobi Kenya*

Gurbachan presented research data that evaluates the ongoing crises in the region which is a strong input for priority decisions for UNITED SIKHS Global Humanitarian Mission. Our participants also had a chance to obtain an update from the field on the evolving conflict and IDP crisis in Ethiopia that was caused by the recent conventional and non-conventional war and armed struggle in Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara region.

IV. TESTIMONY OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SUMMIT AND THE ACADEMY

Harasees Singh: “The 2023 UNITED SIKHS Summit shed light on the prevalent issue of discrimination and its impact in today’s society. The various speakers emphasized the need to protect human rights, prevent hate crimes, and promote overall inclusiveness. The urgent call to embrace diversity and celebrate our differences resonated with me, as it is an important aspect of a united society. Additionally, the speakers highlighted the challenges faced by marginalized communities and emphasized the role of education, legislation, and community engagement in achieving sustainable change. The modern example of Ukraine and the other crises mentioned in the conferences showed the commitment of this organization towards volunteering and bringing justice to the persecuted. Attending this conference was an insightful experience and emphasized the importance of giving back to the community.”

Saibhang Kaur: “I had an incredible experience attending the UNITED SIKHS Summit, where I gained insight into the numerous initiatives undertaken by the organization worldwide, not just in the US. I was deeply inspired by the advocacy efforts and projects being carried out by UNITED SIKHS, and it has motivated me to contribute to my own community. Among the various speakers, I found the talk by United States Attorney Dena J. King to be particularly inspiring, as she rose above adversity and continues to make significant positive changes that benefit both the community and individuals.”



Saibhang Kaur

Harjaap Singh: “Political polarization in the USA has become a significant issue that deeply impacts the US’ overall well-being. I also felt it deeply connected to what I learned in the Webinar, and how we learned about the issues of freedom of speech in the US, and other countries around the world. The country has gone through an ideological divide between liberals and conservatives, with each



Harjaap Singh

side becoming increasingly entrenched in their beliefs and less willing to debate about their stances. This polarization is shown in the sharp partisan divisions seen in Congress and the general public, hindering the ability to pass legislation and find common ground on pressing issues. The media has also played a role, with the rise of biased news outlets, such as Fox News on the right, and MSNBC on the left, and the spread of misinformation further fueling the divide on social media sites, such as Facebook/ big tech. Political polarization leads to a

breakdown in civil discourse, building an “us versus them” mentality and eroding trust in the government’s ability to make meaningful change. It slows down compromise and limits progress on critical challenges such as healthcare, climate change, and immigration. The consequences of this polarization include social divides, unrest, and a lack of national unity. Addressing this issue requires efforts to promote learning, togetherness, and restore a sense of shared values and purpose across the US.”

Jaskiran Kaur: “Attending the 2023 Sikhs Summit and Advocacy & Humanitarian Aid Academy was not only informative but also a truly empowering experience. Throughout the week, there was a strong sense of unity, inspiration, and collective responsibility among the participants. I appreciated that the presentations were done by passionate speakers from diverse backgrounds. I was particularly very inspired by the discussions revolving around humanitarian aid led by Gurvinder Singh and Hardayal Singh. I also enjoyed learning more about all that UNITED SIKHS offers, such as the UMEED helpline. Moreover, the supportive and inclusive environment of the summit created opportunities for networking, collaboration, and the formation of lifelong connections. Participants were able to share their stories, exchange ideas, and find common ground, which further fueled their sense of empowerment and solidarity. The Summit emphasized the power of grassroots movements and community participation. We were encouraged to actively engage in volunteerism, education, and advocacy programs to effect meaningful change. Overall, the 2023 Sikhs Summit was a great experience because it not only provided valuable knowledge but also fostered a profound sense of empowerment.”



Jaskiran Kaur

Harreet Kaur: “As a young Sikh girl, I truly desire to assist the younger generation in maintaining the same connection to Sikhi that I grew up with. I've realized that as generations pass, less and less is being shared with the next. One particular aspect of Sikhi that I am eager to uphold is the Tanti Saajs – a group of stringed instruments played by the Sikh Gurus and others during the 15th century. I hope these instruments won't be forgotten, as I've never felt closer to God than when I play or listen to them during kirtan. Another aspiration of mine is to make a positive impact on the world by helping others. I'm determined to become deeply involved with UNITED SIKHS, as they continually inspire me to assist those in need. During the Summit, I learned about how UNITED SIKHS has aided people from various backgrounds in getting back on their feet, and I hope to follow suit one day.”

V. NYC Government delivered MENTAL HEALTH CRISES and Certificate

One of the highlights of the 2023 Summit and AHAA Academy was the unique opportunity



brought to the audiences by the joint collaboration between UNITED SIKHS and NYC Government to study and present the causation of mental health crises. As such, the Government sent two experts on the subject who conducted an interactive workshop that lasted 3 hours. The participants were certified directly by the NYC Government after successful completion of the workshop requirements.

VI. SIKHS RESOLUTION

The weeklong summit was a wonderful educational opportunity for the youth. The summit allowed the participants to hone their knowledge and skills through the wonderful presentations and instruction by experts from UNITED SIKHS, government leaders, elected officials, and other dignitaries. The summit also created an environment where like-minded youth came together and several of those youth became interested in volunteering for UNITED SIKHS to further their experience through mentorship, coaching, and guidance available to them from the organization.

At the conclusion, the participants of the 2023 Sikhs Summit and the Academy adopted a Global Sikhs Resolution as a symbol of unified commitment to the values, virtues, and principles embedded in Sikhism. This resolution serves as a collective statement of their dedication to promoting peace, justice, equality, and the well-being of all humanity.

VII. PRIORITIES FOR ICHRA

At the conclusion of the Summit and the Academy, UNITED SIKHS's International Civil and Human Rights Advocacy (ICHRA) adopted its items of priority for its yearly advocacy projects. As such, ICHRA staff, drawing from survey results, and close observation of the social and legal issues that the Sikh Community around the world frequently faces, have developed the following thematic areas of priority in its advocacy projects:

- ***National Agenda:***
 - Hate Crime Reporting and Statistics in the United States

- Mental Health Crises caused by frequent acts of hate crime, bullying, and workplace harassment and discrimination
- Sikhs Constitutional right to serve in the US Armed Force and Law Enforcement
- Transnational threat against Sikh leadership and activists
- Protecting Dignity of Sikhs Asylum Seekers
- ***International Agenda:***
 - Foreign Policy accountability in protecting and safeguarding Human Rights for faith-based minority groups in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan
 - Illegal censorship and banning of Sikhs Free Speech
 - Protecting and preserving religious shrines worldwide
 - Sikh's independent representation in the United States Census Code