



GLOBAL SIKHS CIVIL RIGHTS REPORT 2023

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dead and three injured at 6:00 am local time.² In addition to a four-hour gun battle, they also exploded about 20 bombs inside the Gurdwara, which demolished the Gurdwara. Then, they physically stormed the Gurdawara.

One Sikh gentleman, one Gurdwara security guard and one member of the Taliban forces are among the dead; and wounded seven others during an early morning assault.

“The Gurudwara has been demolished and completely destroyed, a place which was sacred to the Sikh Community. Bhai S. Sawinder Singh ji became a martyr in his life while saving the Gurudwara and Sangat. We will never forget this moment of extreme grief. Karte Parwan was the central Gurdwara of Afghanistan and the attack on it was really despicable. The attack injured several others who were hospitalized. One of Guru Granth Sahib Ji’s Swaroops was taken home by S. Raj Singh,” said Talwinder Singh, who was evacuated to Mexico under a political asylum arranged by UNITED SIKHS.

Gurdwara Karte Parwan was the last remaining Sikh house of faith in Kabul.

There were 3 saroops (Holy Scriptures) of Guru Granth Sahib ji in the Gurdwara Sahib when the attack took place. All the saroops have been safely evacuated from the Gurdwara sahib.

Such acts are considered a heinous act of terrorist attack on a sacred space where people gather to worship. It is an unacceptable affront not only to the Sikhs but to all of humanity. Such acts of terrorist attack directly undermine international peace and security and endangers the global public order of human dignity.

Risk of Imminent Extinction: The Sikh community in Afghanistan faces an alarming decline and is at significant risk of extinction due to various factors, including persecution, violence, discrimination, and emigration. UNITED SIKHS has recorded evidence of the Sikh community in Afghanistan being at risk of extinction .³

²<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/18/deadly-attack-on-sikh-temple-in-kabul-leaves-community-in-fear>

³ The numbers have steadily decreased over the past years. It is estimated that there were around 700 000 Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan in the 70s, around 220 000 in 1992 and approximately 150 at the end of 2021, compared to around 400 in the beginning of the same year." source: <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-afghanistan-2023/3143-hindus-and-sikhs#:~:text=The%20numbers%20have%20steadily%20decreased,beginning%20of%20the%20same%20year.>

Persecution and Violence: Sikhs in Afghanistan have been targeted in deadly attacks by extremist groups, leading to loss of life and instilling fear within the community. These attacks have resulted in a decline in the Sikh population as families are forced to leave the country to seek safety elsewhere.

Discrimination: Sikhs in Afghanistan often face discrimination in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and access to public services. This discrimination creates barriers for the community to thrive and contributes to their vulnerability.

Mass Exodus: Many Sikhs in Afghanistan have been forced to leave the country in search of safety and better opportunities elsewhere. The exodus of Sikhs from Afghanistan has accelerated due to the ongoing security threats and lack of protection for minority communities.

RECOMMENDATION: HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY and RELOCATION TO THIRD COUNTRY

As we witness the continuing attack against the Sikhs because of their distinct appearance, identity, culture and faith in countries with little to no governmental protection, we may have to continue to work with international and intergovernmental organization to implement a global humanitarian diplomacy in order to provide humanitarian assistance and to restore the livelihood of the victims and their families. In the past, as a result of the efforts focused on facilitating an avenue for diplomatic means, UNITED SIKHS could relocate 141 Sikhs to a safer country.

We call on international and intergovernmental organizations to not only condemn such acts but also take positive steps in ensuring appropriate mechanisms of accountability as well as security mechanisms for prevention of future attacks are in place.

We ask the government of Afghanistan to ensure the safety of the remaining members of the Sikh communities who are under a direct and imminent terrorist threat. We further request the authorities to maintain the sanctity of historical Gurdwaras in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni. UNITED SIKHS believes in the continued resettlement to a third country due to fear of violent attacks and because Sikhs could not rely on the Taliban government to protect the minority communities.

AUSTRALIA

COUNTRY PROFILE

Head of State: King Charles III

Head of Government: The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, 31st Prime Minister of Australia, sworn in on May 23, 2022.⁴

Total Population: 25.69 million, Per the 2021 census, the top religions included Catholic (20%), Muslim (3.2%), and Hindu (2.7%).⁵

Sikh Population: As of 2021 the Sikh community in Australia comprises more than 210,000 individuals, representing approximately 0.8% of the country's total population.⁶

Currently recognizes Sikhism as a distinctive religion by the state: Yes

Government Structure: Australia is made up of six states, along with two self-governing territories. The national government is called the Federal Government, Commonwealth Government or Australian Government, and it comprises three branches: the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary.

General Sikh Human & Civil Rights: Australia has a significant population of Sikhs, accounting for 0.8% of the population. Although this country has made efforts to celebrate cultural diversity, as evidenced by the many Sikhs that have been actively involved in Australian politics, business, sports and art, the Sikh community faced numerous challenges in the year 2023. Religious

⁴ See Australian government website available at <https://www.pm.gov.au/about-prime-minister>; See also ¹ *Cultural Diversity: Census*. (n.d.). Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved January 6, 2024, from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/cultural-diversity-census/2021>

⁵ See *Infosheet 20 - The Australian system of government*. (n.d.). Parliament of Australia. Retrieved January 6, 2024 from https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_Infosheets/Infosheet_20_-_The_Australian_system_of_government

⁶ See *id* <https://www.sikhyouthaustralia.com/sikhism-in-australia/#:~:text=As%20of%202021%2C%20the%20Sikh,of%20the%20country's%20total%20population.>

prejudice and hate crimes are among the top concerns, as well as discrimination in the workplace and other public spaces. Racial profiling and the suppression of religious freedom is also of great concern and should be remedied by the Australian government immediately to ensure true cultural diversity and acceptance.⁷

HATE CRIMES

Sikhs in Australia are no strangers to hate crimes because of their distinctive look of long beards and turbans. Verbal or physical abuse, assaults, or workplace discrimination are also examples of this prejudice in action.

For several months, a Sikh restaurant owner in Tasmania had been racially targeted for his religion. Jarnail Singh would find graffiti in his driveway that said, “Go home, Indian,” and letters saying the same but with more threats.⁸ Despite Australia being his home for around 15 years, Singh was subjected to such indecency by his fellow citizens. In fact, a Melbourne-based researcher Matteo Vergani, Associate Professor at Deakin University, who leads research at the intersection of online and real-world hateful behaviors, found that the Sikh community has double the risk of being a victim to hate crimes or discrimination in Victoria.⁹ Contributing to this may possibly be due to their discernable look, but which also could have stemmed from racial prejudice and discrimination mistaking Sikhs for Muslims.

DISCRIMINATION & RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE

The Kirpan is part of the Five Ks uniform in Sikhs faith that all initiated Sikhs must adhere to. “Kirpan” literally means “weapon of defense” (“Kirpa” means “mercy” and “Aan” means “honor”) and encapsulates an initiated Sikh’s solemn obligation of courage and defense of truth.

⁷ *Enumerating Australia’s “diverse”: ethnicity and raciology in census and workplace diversity surveys* November 23, 2023 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870.2023.2273313>

⁸ ‘Go home Indian’: Sikh restaurateur racially targeted in Australia. (2023, November 17). The Economic Times NRI. Retrieved January 6, 2024, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/latest-updates/go-home-indian-sikh-restaurateur-racially-targeted-in-australia-report/articleshow/105265908.cms>

⁹ Singh, M. (2020, June 15). *Research looks at hate crimes reported by Sikhs in Victoria*. SBS Punjabi. <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/punjabi/en/podcast-episode/research-looks-at-hate-crimes-reported-by-sikhs-in-victoria/ga3xwvut3>

A Sikh who wears a kirpan is not wearing it because it is a weapon; he or she is wearing it because it is part of their officially prescribed religious uniform.

It has been the center of heated debate in many countries, including Australia. Employment Discrimination is a frequent issue as Sikhs may encounter discrimination in their jobs, especially with their religious articles of faith, such as turbans and kirpans, which may conflict with workplace policies or uniform requirements. Racial Profiling is also another frequent social ill faced by the Sikhs, like other minority groups in the context of counter-terrorism measures..

The country took a step in the right direction in providing religious freedom to Sikhs and safeguarding their right to practice their faith . Under The Weapons Act of 1990 law¹⁰ that banned Sikh students from wearing the kirpan in accordance with their faith was overturned by a court in the state of Queensland.¹¹ The Queensland Supreme Court deemed the ban unconstitutional under the Racial Discrimination Act, or RDA.¹² The Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 (RDA) is a pivotal piece of legislation in Australia that aims to eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality before the law irrespective of race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. Enacted on June 11, 1975, the RDA makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals in various areas of public life, including employment, education, accommodation, and the provision of goods and services. The Act also prohibits racial hatred, making it illegal to publicly offend, insult, humiliate, or intimidate a person or group based on race. By aligning with international human rights standards, specifically the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the RDA underscores Australia's commitment to fostering a multicultural society where all individuals can live free from racial discrimination. This legislation has been instrumental in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social cohesion within the Australian community.¹³

¹⁰ Please see Weapons Act of 1990 available at: <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/act-1990-071>

¹¹ *Australia's highest court overturns law banning Sikhs from carrying kirpans in schools.* (2023, August 05). The Economic Times NRI. Retrieved January 7, 2024, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/latest-updates/australias-highest-court-overturns-law-banning-sikhs-from-carrying-kirpans-in-schools/articleshow/102444334.cms?from=mdr>; See also *Athwal v State of Queensland* [2023] QCA 156 [2023] 32 QLR

<https://www.sclqld.org.au/caselaw/141484>

¹² See also *Id.*

¹³ For brief background on the RDA, see Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 (RDA)

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A00274/2015-12-10/text>

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/about-racial-discrimination>

This ruling ensured that Sikh students are able to enjoy the same freedoms as their pupils and should be an example of the type of advocacy that is needed for Sikhs in other spaces, such as the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION

To address the dominant civil rights issues faced by Sikhs in Australia, a proactive approach is necessary to ensure their rights and dignity are protected and promoted. Some key recommendations include Legislative Strengthening, which includes amending the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 to explicitly cover religious discrimination, ensuring comprehensive protection against bias based on both race and religion. This would better safeguard the rights of Sikh individuals who may face discrimination due to their distinct religious identity. Furthermore, it is vital to implement enhanced Reporting Mechanisms which includes improving and publicizing mechanisms for reporting discrimination and hate crimes, ensuring that Sikh individuals feel safe and supported when seeking justice. Also, having an established national hotlines and online platforms to facilitate confidential and efficient reporting. It is also vital that such hotlines are friendly and accessible to Punjabi speakers to avoid cultural and linguistic barriers.

CANADA



Located Northern North America, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean on the east, North Pacific Ocean on the west, and the Arctic Ocean on the north, north of the conterminous US.

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People and Society¹⁵

Population total: 38,794,813

Ethnic groups

Canadian 15.6%, English 14.7%, Scottish 12.1%, French 11%, Irish 12.1%, German 8.1%, Chinese 4.7%, Italian 4.3%, First Nations 1.7%, Indian 3.7%, Ukrainian 3.5%, Metis 1.5% (2021 est.)

¹⁴ Canada <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/canada/#transnational-issues>

¹⁵ The World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/canada/#transnational-issues>

Note: percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents were able to identify more than one ethnic origin

Religions

Christian 53.3%, Muslim 4.9%, Hindu 2.3%, **Sikh 2.1%**, Buddhist 1%, Jewish 0.9%, Traditional (North American Indigenous) 0.2%, other religions and traditional spirituality 0.6%, none 34.6% (2021 est.)

In 2023, UNITED SIKHS continued its mission to promote and protect the civil rights of the Sikh community in Canada. During this year, the Sikh community faced several significant civil rights issues.

Transnational Repression

The assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Sikh leader in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023, was a major incident that unveils the horrors of **Transnational Repression**. Nijjar was a vocal advocate for the Khalistan movement, and his death led to heightened tensions and fears within the Sikh community.¹⁶

Nijjar, 45 when he died, was a prominent member of a movement to [create an independent Sikh homeland](#) known as Khalistan, and was organizing an unofficial referendum among the Sikh diaspora with the organization Sikhs For Justice. He also owned a plumbing business and served as president of a Sikh temple or gurdwara in suburban Vancouver.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'They can kill us': Fear and Sikh resilience in Canada city amid India spat; Amy Fallon, December 24, 2023; <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/24/they-can-kill-us-fear-and-sikh-resilience-in-canada-city-amid-india-spat>

¹⁷ Who was Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the Sikh activist whose killing has divided Canada and India?, KRUTIKA PATHI AND DAVID COHEN, September 20, 2023; <https://apnews.com/article/canada-india-sikh-trudeau-modi-nijjar-fb390e4a45d167711db4f96681edd0a2>

Canadian police said Nijjar was shot as he was leaving the parking lot of the Sikh temple where he served as president in British Columbia. He suffered multiple gunshot wounds and died at the scene.¹⁸

His death triggered the diplomatic tension between Canada and India.¹⁹ Narratives about the Indian government's alleged involvement in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, raised fears of transnational repression targeting Sikhs in Canada. Other members of the Sikh community said that they feel safe in Canada and that all Sikhs would therefore like to live here. However, after the attack, some Sikhs here said that their entire community and its leaders live in fear that the Indian government might send an assassin after them.²⁰

Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism

Sikh men and women may be more visible and vulnerable to racism than other religious groups. They display five articles of faith known as the five K's, including keshas (unshorn hair) and kara (an iron bracelet), and in addition, Sikh men (and some Sikh women) wear turbans that are considered to be an essential part of their faith and a source of pride for the wearer. Following the September 11th terrorist attacks, those wearing turbans are more likely to experience discrimination and it has been argued that *“the turban has transformed from a sacred piece of attire for Sikhs to a target for discriminatory conduct and an object of marginalization after 9/11”*. As a consequence, Sikh men have reported substantial misidentification and discrimination. Such experiences have caused considerable distress and concerns for personal safety.²¹

Discrimination, hate crimes and racism against members of the Sikh community were undeniable, with the youth being targeted as victims. One of whom, **Gagandeep Singh**, an international student who, in the evening of March 17, 2023, was swarmed and beaten by a group of people, ripped off his turban and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Canada's Sikhs under pressure amid row with India, [Ines Pohl](https://www.dw.com/en/canadas-sikhs-under-pressure-amid-row-with-india/a-66961347), September 29, 2023; <https://www.dw.com/en/canadas-sikhs-under-pressure-amid-row-with-india/a-66961347>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The Lived Experience of Racism in the Sikh Community, Gayle Brewer, Jatinder Singh and Minna Lyons, December 7, 2023; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08862605231218225?icid=int.sj-full-text.citing-articles.1>

was dragged across the sidewalk by his hair. This incident goes far beyond a mere act of hate,²² It transgresses the human dignity of the young man Gagandeep.

The Canada 2023 Hate Crime Report as published by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) recorded a total of 4,777 hate crimes, of which 2,194 were motivated by bias based on race, ethnicity, bias against language and immigrants. Also captured under the category of bias against members of other religion and belief, tallied to 113 hate based crimes against Buddhist, Hindu, **Sikh**, Traditional Indigenous Spirituality, and other unknown religion.²³

Measures to aid victims of abuse

UNITED SIKHS' efforts have focused on addressing discrimination, advocating for policy changes, providing legal and support services, and educating the community. This report highlights our key initiatives, achievements, and the impact of our work.

Civil Rights Advocacy. UNITED SIKHS has been at the forefront of advocating for the civil rights of Sikhs in Canada. Working on several high-profile cases included Collaborating with government agencies and other NGOs to address and mitigate incidents of discrimination, hosting forums and roundtable discussions to bring attention to civil rights issues affecting the Sikh community, and engaging in media campaigns to raise awareness and educate the public on the importance of civil rights for all.

Legal Support. Our legal team has provided crucial assistance to individuals facing civil rights violations. This support has been instrumental in helping victims seek justice and hold perpetrators accountable. The key activities include client

²² 'Absolutely disgusting': B.C. councillor speaks out after Sikh international student swarmed, beaten, Lisa Steacy, March 22, 2023 <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/absolutely-disgusting-b-c-councillor-speaks-out-after-sikh-international-student-swarmed-beaten-1.6320026>

²³ Canada Hate Crime Report 2023, OSCE-ODIHR, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/reporting/canada/2023>

representation in court cases related to discrimination, hate crimes, and violations of religious freedoms, free legal consultations and workshops to educate community members about their rights, and collaborating with legal experts and scholars to develop resources and guides on civil rights protections.

Community Education and Outreach. Education and outreach have been central to our mission. **UNITED SIKHS** has conducted public awareness campaigns to empower the Sikh community.

Policy Advocacy. **UNITED SIKHS'** active involvement in advocating for policy changes that promote equality and protect the rights of Sikhs included lobbying for the implementation and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, engaging with policymakers to influence legislation that affects the Sikh community and Submitting reports and recommendations to government bodies on issues such as religious freedoms, hate crimes, and equal opportunities.

Support Services. In addition to advocacy and education, **UNITED SIKHS** has provided vital support services to survivors and their families. **Counseling and Psychological Support** offered trauma-informed counseling and psychological support to help victims cope with the aftermath of discrimination and violence. **Emergency Assistance** provided financial aid, shelter, and other essential resources to individuals and families in crisis. **Community Helpline** to maintain a helpline for community members to report incidents and seek immediate assistance.

Observations

The Government of Canada has been actively working to address issues of transnational repression, prejudice, discrimination, hate crimes, and bias against the Sikh community through various initiatives and strategies.²⁴

²⁴ The Government of Canada launches *Canada's Action Plan on Combating Hate*; <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2024/09/the-government-of-canada-launches-canadas-action-plan-on-combatting-hate.html>

Transnational Repression

Canada has a robust national security framework that recognizes the threat posed by foreign states to individuals, including members of specific diasporas. Intelligence and law enforcement bodies coordinate to warn and protect targeted individuals²⁵. The government also independently vets Interpol Red Notices before taking action.

Prejudice and Discrimination

Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2028 aims to eradicate systemic racism and discrimination. The strategy focuses on promoting economic, social, and cultural empowerment, advancing racial equity in various systems, and driving justice and public safety reforms.²⁶

Hate Crimes

The Government of Canada has launched Canada's Action Plan on Combating Hate, which is a comprehensive cross-government effort to combat hate. The plan includes empowering communities to identify and prevent hate, supporting victims and survivors, and building community trust and partnerships.²⁷ The government has also introduced amendments to the Criminal Code to address hate speech and hate crimes.²⁸

Bias Against Sikh Community

While there isn't a specific action plan solely for the Sikh community, the broader

²⁵ Canada: Transnational Repression Host Country Case Study; <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/canada>

²⁶ Combating systemic racism and discrimination in Canada, Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2028; <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/combating-racism-discrimination.html>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Government of Canada takes action to protect Canadians against hate speech and hate crimes, Department of Justice Canada; <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-justice/news/2021/06/government-of-canada-takes-action-to-protect-canadians-against-hate-speech-and-hate-crimes.html>

initiatives to combat hate and discrimination apply to all communities, including Sikhs. The government's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, as well as to protect human rights, benefit the Sikh community as well.

These actions demonstrate Canada's commitment to creating a safer and more inclusive society for all its residents.

MEXICO AND ITS BORDERS

Immigration Crisis in the U.S./Mexico Border

The long-standing humanitarian crisis at the U.S./Mexico border is worsening day by day. This month, news of two young children found dead shortly after crossing the border seeking asylum with their parents highlights the severity of the current conditions and impact from broken immigration policies.²⁹

The Case of 6-year-old Gurpreet Kaur

It was mid-morning on June 11 when smugglers dropped the group Gurpreet was traveling with near an interstate on the Mexican side of the border and told them to walk north, as reported by CNN.³⁰ The area about 17 miles west of Lukeville, Arizona, is "extremely remote," and it's rare for migrants to cross there. It wasn't long before Gurpreet and the other child in the group -- an 8-year-old -- were struggling. The group decided to split up. Gurpreet's mom headed away with another woman in search of water, leaving Gurpreet with the other mother and child. They were never able to find each other again.

A day later, on the morning of June 12, a Border Patrol agent patrolling a path spotted footsteps in the sand. He came upon the two women who'd been searching for water -- and learned the rest of their group was missing. Agents searched the area for hours and found Gurpreet's remains. It took them more than a day of additional searching to find the other mother and child she had been left with. They were taken to a hospital and treated for dehydration. Authorities aren't sure exactly how the group got separated -- or what happened to them in the desert.

²⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/woman-2-children-die-crossing-rio-grande-border-patrol-says-was-preven-rcna133842>

³⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/24/us/border-indian-girl-death/index.html>

The Case of 23-month-old Angie Valeria

As reported by the NPR,³¹ The desperate and tragic plight of a father and daughter who drowned while trying to cross the border from Mexico into the U.S. has become a new flashpoint in the border crisis, after a photographer captured a haunting image that shows the pair lying face down, washed onto the banks of the Rio Grande. Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez, 25, died as he tried to bring his daughter, Angie Valeria, to safety and a new life in the U.S.

Ramírez's wife, Tania Vanessa Avalos, says she watched from the shore as her husband and daughter were pulled away by a strong river current near the border crossing between Matamoros, Mexico, and Brownsville, Texas. The small family was fleeing poverty in El Salvador and had secured a humanitarian visa in Mexico — but after spending two months in a migrant camp waiting to apply for asylum in the U.S., Martínez decided that they should try to cross the border on Sunday, June 23. A photo shows the pair at their final resting place, lying along the riverbank with their feet in the water and their heads on the reeds of dry land. The toddler is tucked into her dad's T-shirt — an apparent attempt to keep her close as the current took them away. Her arm is flung around his neck.

RECOMMENDATION:

We request a full-scale investigation that looks into the circumstances around these tragic deaths. In addition, we are calling on all stakeholder to support legislation to be enacted that would enable provisions for temporary asylum, housing and health care to be processed immediately upon entry to the U.S., rather than placement in a detention facility until a hearing can be scheduled, such as the [Alternatives to Detention Act \(HR 532/S 1894\)](#). As specialists of disaster relief best practices, we also request access to the location

³¹<https://www.everand.com/article/414610668/A-Father-And-Daughter-Who-Drowned-At-The-Border-Put-Attention-On-Immigration>

to host a prayer vigil and offer aid to refugees in line with the Border Aid package approved by Congress.

UNITED KINGDOM



UNITED
KINGDOM



The United Kingdom (UK) is a sovereign country located off the northwestern coast of mainland Europe. It comprises four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The UK is known for its rich history, cultural heritage, and significant contributions to arts, science, and politics.

As an influential member of international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, the G7, and the Commonwealth, it boasts a diverse and multicultural society, with a mix of urban centers and picturesque countryside. The UK has played a pivotal role in global history, shaping modern democracy, literature, and scientific advancements.

Population

- **Total Population:** Approximately **69,305,487** as of 2024.
- **Urban Population:** Around **84.4%** of the population lives in urban areas.

Racial Statistics (England and Wales)

- **White:** 81.7%
 - White British: 74.4%
 - White Other: 6.2%
- **Asian:** 9.3%
 - Indian: 3.1%
 - Pakistani: 2.5%
 - Bangladeshi: 0.97%
- **Black:** 4.0%
 - Black Caribbean: 0.94%
 - Nigerian: 0.44%
- **Mixed:** 2.9%
- **Other:** 2.1%

Religious Demographics in the United Kingdom (2021 Census)

Religion	Percentage of Population	Number of People
Christian	46.2%	27.5 million
No Religion	37.2%	22.2 million
Muslim	6.5%	3.9 million
Hindu	1.7%	1.0 million
Sikh	0.7%	0.4 million
Buddhist	0.5%	0.3 million

Jewish	0.2%	0.1 million
Other	1.3%	0.8 million

The Sikh community represents a smaller percentage but remains an important part of the religious landscape.

In 2023, several important civil rights cases transpired in the United Kingdom, highlighting significant issues and challenges faced by various communities. These cases reflect the ongoing challenges and debates surrounding civil rights and human rights protections in the United Kingdom, as it underscores the importance of continued advocacy and legal support to ensure that the rights of all individuals are respected and upheld.

Rwanda Asylum Plan Ruling:

In November 2023, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the UK government's plan to transfer asylum seekers to Rwanda was unlawful. The court found that Rwanda was not a safe third country, which led to the suspension of the plan.

The Sikh community, like other minority groups, has expressed concerns about the UK government's asylum policies and their impact on vulnerable individuals seeking refuge.

Public Order Act:

The UK government passed the Public Order Act in April 2023, which further criminalized people's right to peaceful protest. This act was introduced amid an ongoing crackdown on climate change protesters and was criticized for undermining the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

The restrictions on peaceful protest have affected Sikh activists and organizations that participate in demonstrations advocating for civil rights and social justice.

Illegal Migration Act:

In July 2023, the UK government adopted the Illegal Migration Act, which bans access to asylum and modern slavery protections for anyone who arrives irregularly in the UK. This act was widely condemned for its harsh measures and potential human rights violations.

Windrush Compensation Scheme:

The UK government faced ongoing criticism for its handling of the Windrush compensation scheme, which aimed to compensate Black Britons whose rights were harmed by government policies. Despite promises, many victims, including members of the Sikh community have faced challenges due to reported delays and difficulties in accessing compensation and justice.

Anti-Boycott Bill:

In June 2023, the UK government introduced an anti-boycott bill that restricts public bodies, including universities and local councils, from directing investments to avoid contributing to human rights abuses. This bill was seen as an attempt to limit public dissent and activism.

These cases reflect the ongoing challenges and debates surrounding civil rights and human rights protections in the United Kingdom. They underscore the importance of continued advocacy and legal support to ensure that the rights of all individuals are respected and upheld.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address and resolve civil rights issues affecting the Sikh community and other minorities in the United Kingdom, key actions require efficient implementation:

1. Strengthen Anti-Discrimination Laws

- **Enhanced Legislation:** Introduce and enforce stronger anti-discrimination laws that specifically address hate crimes, racial profiling, and religious discrimination.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Ensure that anti-discrimination laws cover all aspects of public life, including employment, education, housing, and public services.

2. Promote Inclusive Policies

- **Policy Reforms:** Advocate for policy reforms that promote inclusivity and equality in all sectors. This includes reviewing existing policies to identify and eliminate any discriminatory practices.
- **Training and Education:** Mandate diversity and inclusion training for all public sector employees, including law enforcement and education professionals, to foster a more inclusive environment.

3. Enhance Support Services

- **Legal Aid:** Expand legal aid services to provide better access to justice for victims of civil rights violations. This includes offering free legal consultations and representation.
- **Counseling and Support:** Provide comprehensive counseling and psychological support services to help victims of discrimination and hate crimes cope with the trauma.

4. Improve Community Engagement and Education

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the general public about the importance of civil rights and the contributions of the Sikh community to British society.
- **Community Programs:** Develop and support community programs that promote understanding and cooperation between different cultural and religious groups.

5. Strengthen Law Enforcement and Accountability

- **Hate Crime Units:** Establish dedicated hate crime units within police departments to investigate and address hate crimes more effectively.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Implement robust accountability mechanisms to ensure that law enforcement officers who engage in discriminatory practices are held accountable.

6. Foster International Cooperation

- **Global Advocacy:** Advocate for international cooperation to address transnational repression and ensure the protection of human rights activists and leaders.
- **Collaborative Efforts:** Work with international organizations to share best practices and develop strategies for combating discrimination and promoting civil rights.

7. Support Policy and Legislative Advocacy

- **Lobbying Efforts:** Support and engage in lobbying efforts to influence legislation and policies that protect the rights of minorities and promote equality.
- **Research and Reports:** Conduct research and publish reports on the state of civil rights to inform policymakers and the public about ongoing issues and recommended solutions.

8. Promote Economic Empowerment

- **Employment Programs:** Develop and support employment programs that provide training and job opportunities for marginalized communities.
- **Economic Incentives:** Create economic incentives for businesses that promote diversity and inclusion in their workforce.

the United States' population. To the average citizen, the disproportionate discrimination may be surprising. In fact, they might first ask, "Who even are Sikhs?" While many people may not be able to define who a Sikh is, Sikhs wear turbans and *kakkars* that visually set them apart from other individuals. This has a wide range of impacts on the Sikh community in North America: from self acceptance to experiencing issues with the law.

This work will focus on the discrimination Sikhs face in North America. While it is clear that Sikhs face disproportionate discrimination, legislative action should ensure the safety of each individual. However, Davis (2016) finds that hate crimes are underreported, and therefore, "encourage...incidents." Olmos (2023) furthers this claim with evidence that the FBI's report on hate crimes, which claimed that hate crimes decreased between 2020 and 2021 was incredibly flawed. In fact, the FBI's report was "drawn from a pool of 3,255 fewer law enforcement agencies" between the years 2020 and 2021. However, Olmos finds that the decrease in participation amongst agencies is due to a newer, beneficial system of reporting hate crimes which includes more intricate details of each crime. While the Justice Department has provided millions of dollars in aid to various agencies, there has still been a trend of underreporting hate crimes.³³

Recent hate crimes against Sikhs in North America have affected not only the victim and their loved ones, but every individual within the religious community. To ensure legislative systems are beneficial to religious communities, there must be action taken to improve turnout and accuracy of hate crime reporting.

HATE CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES

Hate crimes against Sikhs in the United States have been a recurring and concerning issue, often stemming from a combination of ignorance, mistaken identity, and prejudice. Sikhs, identifiable by their distinct appearance, including turbans and beards, have sometimes been mistakenly targeted in the aftermath of terrorist attacks due to a lack of understanding of their faith and cultural

³³<https://www.wusf.org/2022-12-27/researchers-say-the-fbis-statistics-on-hate-crimes-across-the-country-are-flawed>

practices. One notable incident occurred in 2012 when a white supremacist opened fire in a Sikh gurdwara (place of worship) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six worshippers.

FBI Annual Statistics and Its Scientific Insufficiency

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines hate crimes as “criminal offense[s] against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.”³⁴ On October 16, 2023, the FBI released its Hate Crime Statistics data for the previous fiscal year, revealing an alarming increase in hate crimes against Sikhs in the United States, making Sikhs the second most targeted faith group after Jews.³⁵ The statistics provide information about the offenses, victims, offenders, and locations of hate crimes.

According to the report, in 2022, law enforcement agency participation significantly increased, resulting in 14,631 law enforcement agencies, with a population coverage of 91.7% submitting incident reports.³⁶ These reports involved 11,634 criminal incidents and 13,337 related offenses as being motivated by bias toward race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and gender identity.³⁷ There were over 11,000 single-bias hate crime incidents involving 13,278 victims and 346 multiple-bias hate crime incidents that involved 433 victims.³⁸ In 2022, the top three bias categories in single-bias incidents were race/ethnicity/ancestry, religion, and sexual-orientation.³⁹

This data presents a grave concern about the rise in hate crimes and the inherent problems in accurately capturing the magnitude of this issue. While recognizing the efforts of the FBI and law enforcement agencies in improving the recording and documenting of hate crime data, it is evident that the data still falls short of fully depicting the extent of hate crimes and the fear the Sikhs

³⁴ “Defining a Hate Crime,” FBI.gov, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes#Definition>

³⁵ FBI’s hate crime data can be accessed at [CDE \(cjis.gov\)](https://cde.cjis.gov); See also <https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2022-hate-crime-statistics>

³⁶ See *id*

³⁷ See *id*

³⁸ See *id*

³⁹ See *id*

community faces daily. The voluntary nature of reporting by law enforcement agencies is a significant hindrance to obtaining comprehensive and accurate hate crime data.

In the 2022 data, there was an encouraging increase in the number of law enforcement agencies participating in reporting hate crimes. However, it remains insufficient in revealing the true scale of the problem. Discrepancies between the Department of Justice's hate crime estimation data and the FBI's reported hate crime incidents are also glaring. On average, U.S. residents experienced approximately 246,900 hate crime victimizations each year between 2005 and 2019. The number of hate crimes ranged from about 173,600 to 305,390 during this period.⁴⁰ Whereas the FBI reported only 11,634 hate crime incidents in 2022. Although this is from a different fiscal year, it sufficiently and evidently indicates the glaring data discrepancy between two federal government agencies - the DOJ and the FBI. UNITED SIKHS believe that such disparities highlight the evident lacking in the voluntariness of the FBI data system and the need for a more robust and accurate data collection system.

Recommendation: UNITED SIKHS believe in the pressing need for accurate and comprehensive national data on hate crime incidents if the goal is to effectively uproot this social evil. Inaccurate data systems and underreporting of hate crimes only serve to underestimate the true extent of the problem. UNITED SIKHS strongly recommend an institutionalization of effective reporting mechanisms with the adoption or enactment of legislative measures in order to achieve an increased cultural and religious competence among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to enhance their capacity in identifying, preventing, and investigating hate crimes. Nevertheless, these latest statistics serve as a stark reminder that there is much work left to be done. Hate crimes are not isolated incidents; they are attacks on the very essence of a diverse and inclusive America. Our mission remains clear: we must unite as a society to eradicate hate, intolerance, and violence. UNITED SIKHS remains unwavering in its dedication to this goal and pledges support to all those working towards a more just and inclusive future.

⁴⁰ See Office of Justice Programs Fact Sheet Research, Programs, and Initiatives that Address Hate Crimes; April 07, 2022

INDIVIDUAL CASES OF HATE CRIME

The Case of Jasmer Singh, Queens New York

NYPD has reclassified the incident involving Jasmer Singh as a hate crime.⁴¹ UNITED SIKHS responded to the distressing news with a swift and firm commitment to justice, engaging a cadre of senior officials, civil rights experts, activists, and organizers. This concerted effort has been instrumental in advancing a strategic approach that has produced substantial results.

The killing of Jasmer Singh, initially not recognized as a hate crime by the NYPD, has witnessed a remarkable turnaround due to relentless advocacy and unwavering community mobilization. Special thanks are due to Community Advisor Japneet Singh and Community Relations Officer Inderjeet Singh, whose dedication and resolve played a critical role. The Sikh Cultural Society, Gurdwara Baba Makhan Shah Lubana, and other community leaders and activists have also been pivotal in this collective push for justice. Most importantly the resolve of Mr Subeg Singh in pursuing this with so much determination and commitment is remarkable, despite his tragic circumstances. The tireless efforts and relentless advocacy, in coordination with community leaders from various organizations including UNITED SIKHS' was instrumental in this achievement.

Through close collaboration with the Queens District Attorney's Office and other dedicated stakeholders, we diligently pushed for a hate crime-focused investigation. The outcome has been groundbreaking, with the suspect now facing 20 separate counts, including a hate crime charge.

Our comprehensive approach included community mobilization, organization, and leadership of rallies, strategic engagement with elected officials ranging from local council members to Congress, meetings with NYC Mayor Adams and faith leaders, and collaborative discussions with federal agencies. In our tireless pursuit of justice, we maintained close bonds with Mr. Singh's family members, particularly his son, Subeg Singh. This all-encompassing strategy left no stone

⁴¹ *Man Accused in Fatal Beating of Sikh Driver Faces Hate Crimes Charges*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/31/nyregion/sikh-man-killing-hate-crime-charges.html>

unturned, ensuring that every resource at our disposal was utilized to secure the investigation and prosecution of Mr. Jasmer's murder as a hate crime.

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

THE ISSUE: SIKHS ARTICLE OF FAITH AS THE REASON FOR DISCRIMINATION

The Sikh article of faith, known as the Five Ks, represents the core tenets of the Sikh religion and serves as a visible symbol of Sikh identity. These articles include Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (a wooden comb), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kachera (cotton undergarments), and Kirpan (a ceremonial sword). Each of these articles holds a deep significance in Sikhism, reflecting the values of spirituality, discipline, and equality. The Five Ks are not just symbols but also serve practical purposes, such as the kirpan symbolizing the Sikh duty to protect the oppressed and the kachera symbolize modesty and self-restraint. Together, these articles of faith form a central part of Sikh identity and serve as a reminder of the Sikh commitment to their faith and its principles.

In the United States, Sikhs have faced discrimination due to their articles of faith, particularly the kirpan, turban and beard worn by Sikh men as part of their religious observance. Sikh Americans have been mistaken for Muslims and targeted in hate crimes and discrimination, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks - a multilayer of discrimination one as a Siks and other as a muslim. The turban, which is worn as a symbol of faith and equality in Sikhism, has often been associated with stereotypes and misconceptions about terrorism and extremism.

UNITED SIKHS maintains records of workplace discrimination. Sikh Americans have reported incidents of discrimination in various settings, including workplaces, schools,⁴² and public spaces. They have faced challenges in employment due to their appearance, with some employers citing safety concerns or customer preferences as reasons for not hiring them.⁴³ Sikh children have been

⁴²Reports available here: <https://ethnicmediaservices.org/stop-the-hate/two-thirds-of-turbaned-sikh-american-boys-are-bullied-at-school/>

⁴³ See *id*

bullied in schools, facing taunts and harassment because of their religious attire.⁴⁴

In the following section of the report, we present the relevant Federal and State laws and policy applicable to a few individual cases of workplace discrimination.

RULE: *Law and Policy of Kirpan*

The Kirpan is part of the Five Ks uniform in Sikhs faith that all initiated Sikhs must adhere to. “Kirpan” literally means “weapon of defense” (“Kirpa” means “mercy” and “Aan” means “honor”) and encapsulates an initiated Sikh’s solemn obligation of courage and defense of truth. A Sikh who wears a kirpan is not wearing it because it is a weapon; he or she is wearing it because it is part of their officially prescribed religious uniform.

The 'Kirpan' is an important religious symbol of Sikhism. Sikhs have a full legal right to carry Kirpans in public.

“The Sikh religion has been part of world history since the fourteenth century. An integral part of that religion is the symbolism embodied in the five k’s worn by its members. To be a Sikh is to wear a kirpan — it is that simple. It is a religious symbol, and in no way a weapon.”⁴⁵

Kirpan rule emerged from a groundbreaking case in 2006 when IRS employee Kawaljit Kaur Tagore (**Tagore v. United States**) successfully sued several government agencies. The court generally ruled in favor of Tagore’s right to carry Kirpan as part of religious freedom. Since then, the following policy was installed by the US government.⁴⁶

Wearing Kirpan in Federal Building: Kirpan Blades less than 2.5 inches

⁴⁴ Report available at <https://khalsavox.com/news/a-turban-is-not-a-target-sikh-students-face-bullying-in-us-schools/>

⁴⁵ Judge Mark Painter, Former Judge of Ohio Appeals Court; and United Nations Appeals Tribunal

⁴⁶ *Tagore v. United States* - the federal government agreed to settle the case and change its nationwide policies to accommodate Sikh federal employees – a victory for Sikh Americans and religious freedom.

If you are carrying **Kirpan with a blade of less than 2.5 inches**, then you can wear it into all of the federal facilities/buildings in the nation that are protected by the Federal Protective Service (FPS). The UNITED SIKHS highly recommends to fully comply if you are asked by the security officer at any federal buildings to show your Kirpan or walk through metal detectors. Do not unsheath your Kirpan unless you are expressly required to do so by the Security Officer at the gate.⁴⁷

Kirpan Blades with 2.5 inches or longer

Kirpan with a blade of 2.5 inches or longer requires an exception or exemption to enter Federal Buildings. A Facility Security Committee (FSC) representative is the entity that determines an exception (temporary in nature and granted for specific occurrences or a defined time period) or exemption (permanent in nature until rescinded). The granting of an accommodation is also discretionary. If the FSC issues an exception or exemption, the individual would be allowed to enter the building with Kirpan.

State Law of Kirpan

The right to practice one's religion is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Many states have recognized the religious significance of the kirpan and have made exceptions in weapons laws to accommodate Sikhs who wear it as a religious article. However, the specific laws can vary from State to State, and it's important for individuals to be aware of the laws in their particular jurisdiction.

For example, State courts in New York and Ohio have ruled in favor of Sikhs who faced the rare situation of prosecution under anti-weapons statutes for wearing kirpans, "because of the kirpan's religious nature and Sikhs' benign intent in wearing them."⁴⁸

⁴⁷<https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/foia/prohibited-items-program-nppd-fps-directive-15.9.3.1.pdf>

⁴⁸ DETAIL OF THE CASE TO BE CITED

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUE- *Discrimination in Law Enforcement*

Sikhs, a religious minority with a distinctive appearance, have faced challenges in the law enforcement sector due to visible symbols of their faith, such as turbans and beards. Sikhism, originating in the 15th century in South Asia, is a monotheistic religion that emphasizes equality, justice, and selfless service. Sikhs maintain a unique appearance as part of their religious observance, which includes wearing turbans and maintaining unshorn hair. Unfortunately, these visible markers have made Sikhs vulnerable to discrimination, particularly in professions like law enforcement. This section of the report captures the struggles Sikhs encounter in law enforcement in many jurisdictions in the United States

Discrimination in Hiring

One of the primary challenges faced by Sikhs in law enforcement is discrimination during the recruitment and hiring process. Instances have been reported where Sikh applicants are denied opportunities or terminated from police academies solely based on their religious attire, as some law enforcement agencies have stringent and obsolete uniform policies that do not accommodate religious diversity. This discriminatory practice not only deprives qualified individuals of career opportunities but also perpetuates a lack of diversity within law enforcement agencies. Below, the report narrates the story of Sikhs who are victims of such discrimination.

The case of Mr. Jaspreet Singh:

Factual Background/Case Brief - Jaspreet Singh applied for the position of Deputy Sheriff Trainee at the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office in November 2022. Following successful completion of several stages in the hiring process, he received a hire letter in July 2023. Unfortunately, his employment was terminated on August 29, 2023, due to his beard and Kirpan, which he was not allowed to trim because of his Sikh faith; and also because he was required to carry Kirpan due to his deeply held religious beliefs as a devoted Sikh. Despite his sincere efforts to convey his situation to the Sheriff's Office seeking accommodation, a mutually acceptable resolution could not be reached that would have allowed him to be Sikh and a member of law enforcement. He was forced to leave a career he loved. He now is without employment simply

because he is Sikh.⁴⁹

Jaspreet Singh is a sincere believer and practitioner of the Sikh religion. Sikhism mandates that baptized men keep unshorn hair and beards and wear a Kirpan. Mr. Singh was compelled to choose between his faith and his chosen career path—a situation that forced him to decide between serving his God and his country. Mr. Singh opted for the former. In other words, he was terminated unlawfully and unconstitutionally because of his religion.

Constitutional Review Standard - “Compelling Governmental Interest”

The decision to terminate Mr. Singh's employment raises concerns about the potential failure to strike a balance between an individual's right to practice their religion and an employer's need to maintain legitimate workplace requirements. It is well-established that employers are generally required to make reasonable accommodations for employees' religious beliefs, as long as such accommodations do not impose an undue hardship on their operations.

Furthermore, there is no demonstrable evidence showing a compelling governmental interest in denying Mr. Singh the right to serve in law enforcement. Mr. Singh was denied the liberty to, simultaneously, pursue Sikhism and his desire to contribute to the law enforcement community.

While conducting this report, the team had a chance to investigate experiences of some counties where there was a successful hiring of Sikhs officers with a fair level of religious accommodation.⁵⁰ We found out that some counties in California law enforcement have already successfully accommodated Sikhs to serve with their articles of faith intact on their bodies. This demonstrates that accommodations in fact can be made without compromising the effectiveness of the department or the safety of officers and the community. Such a level of inconsistency in

⁴⁹https://www.ted.com/talks/jaspreet_singh_why_i_love_wearing_my_dastar_and_my_kirpan#:~:text=He%20is%20the%20first%20international,life%20listen%20to%20his%20story.

⁵⁰Deputy Sandeep Dhaliwal of Harris County in Texas. The Harris County Sheriff in Texas granted the ability to wear turbans to Sikh deputies on patrol in 2015. His sorties is available here - <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/02/us/sikh-deputy-sandeep-dhaliwal-profile/index.html>

In 2014, **Officer Jaskirat Singh** was allowed to wear a turban while working for the **Milpitas police**, even though that department didn't have a specific turban policy. He was the only known turbaned officer at the time for the department.

approach to religious accommodation demonstrates that there is no compelling governmental interest that justifies the disparate treatment when it comes to hiring the Sikhs.

RECOMMENDATION - *Capacity Building*

To address workplace discrimination faced by Sikhs in law enforcement, several steps can be taken. First, there is a need for increased cultural competency training within law enforcement agencies to educate personnel about different faith traditions and foster a more inclusive atmosphere. This can be accomplished by foreign institutional partnership with Sikhs Civil Rights organizations such as UNITED SIKHS. Additionally, revisiting and amending uniform policies to accommodate religious diversity can contribute to a more equitable workplace. Reiterating the importance of the policy in question for our community, it is highly recommended that the Sikh community can be included in the consultation process. It is crucial for the Sikhs community to have a say in a policy that directly affects us, particularly one that encourages greater Sikh representation within Law Enforcement in the County. Lastly, fostering open dialogue and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and Sikh community leaders can help build trust and address concerns.

Addressing the concerns related to the Kirpan can be effectively resolved through the development of cultural competency in both private and public sector employment. UNITED SIKHS is dedicated to fostering such understanding by offering training sessions, manuals, and webinars for government agencies and private sector employers seeking knowledge in this area.

UNITED SIKHS has been actively working to raise awareness about Sikhism and combat discrimination. We have engaged in outreach efforts to educate others about Sikhs faith and the significance of their articles of faith. Additionally, advocacy efforts have been made to strengthen laws against hate crimes and discrimination, ensuring that Sikh Americans are protected and their rights respected.

SIKHS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO INTERSTATE TRAVEL

Sikhs often face challenges and discrimination at airports while traveling due to their religious attire, particularly the requirement to wear a turban and maintain unshorn hair. Airport security

measures, such as metal detectors and body scanners, can lead to additional screening procedures for Sikhs wearing a turban, causing delays and inconvenience. Despite efforts to educate security personnel about Sikh religious practices, misunderstandings and lack of awareness still result in discriminatory treatment, including unnecessary removal of the turban or pat-down searches, which is humiliating and distressing for Sikh travelers.

Furthermore, the implementation of policies such as the TSA PreCheck⁵¹ program,⁵² which allows for expedited security screening for low-risk travelers, has raised concerns among Sikhs regarding their inclusion in such programs. Sikhs are reported to have challenges in obtaining PreCheck status, citing that their religious attire and appearance might subject them to heightened scrutiny, undermining the purpose of the program.

These challenges highlight the need for increased awareness and sensitivity training among airport staff to ensure that Sikh travelers are treated respectfully and without discrimination.

Below, we highlight stories we obtain in the process of conducting this annual research report.

INTER-STATE TRAVEL - Story of Sikh American teenager with Turban at Airport

On the 8th of May, 2023, Tegbeer Singh was traveling from Phoenix Sky Harbor airport *via* Southwest airlines. His destination was Los Angeles international airport. In this particular incident, this Sikh teenager successfully passed through the metal detector, hand wand detector, and pat-down search without triggering any alarms. Yet, TSA officers exercised discretionary measures that we deem entirely unwarranted and unreasonable. Given the thoroughness of the three layers of search, it is inconceivable that an individual would be asked to remove their turban in public unless their identity, religion, or appearance were deemed relevant, which is highly improbable.

⁵¹ TSA PreCheck® provides expedited security screening benefits for flights departing from U.S. Airports. Global Entry provides expedited U.S. customs screening for international air travelers when entering the United States. Global Entry members also receive TSA PreCheck® benefits as part of their membership.

⁵² <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/tsa-pre.asp>

Disparate Impact or Intentional Discrimination?

These issues stem from inherent policy deficiencies within the agency, which demonstrate a lack of awareness and sensitivity toward minority communities such as Sikhs. It is not merely a failure of policy implementation but also a deficiency in establishing effective, self-executing, and self-guiding screening procedures, thereby perpetuating harm against minority communities based on their race, religion, or nationality.

It also epitomizes a glaring display of disproportionate and unreasonably discretionary secondary screening, subjecting Sikhs to the likelihood of invasive procedures. Moreover, it pertains to the arbitrary removal of a Turban in public without due consideration for its religious significance. Sikhs have the right to refuse the removal of their turbans in public, particularly if they have successfully cleared the metal detection procedure and undergone additional screening via a pat-down. However, in the case we have presented, the Sikh teenager had to request the presence of a TSO Supervisor and persuade them to provide a private room for the turban removal. Securing a private room became such a significant challenge that the teenager had to convince the supervisor themselves.

Such conducts of the agencies not only violate the constitutionally protected right of the individual, but also erode the trust between the Sikh community and relevant governmental agencies such as the TSA.

International Travel - Unduly Prolonged “Administrative Processing” for Visa

The story of Mr. Amrik Singh Gill, a British Citizen

Mr. Amrik Singh, a leading Chapter member of UNITED SIKHS in the United Kingdom and a senior human rights activist for the Sikh community there. He has been deeply involved in advocating for human rights of Sikhs globally. As a British citizen, he has dedicated much of his time to volunteering within the Sikh community.

About three years ago, Mr. Singh applied for a US visa to visit his terminally ill brother, who is

under hospice care in Massachusetts. He provided comprehensive medical evidence from his brother's attending physician in Massachusetts to support his visa application.

Despite submitting all required documents, including a detailed 15-year travel history as requested by the US Embassy in London, Mr. Singh's visa application was refused nearly two years ago under Section 221(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. His application remains stagnant in "administrative processing" status as of 2021, sparking significant concern regarding travel issues for Sikhs. The prolonged administrative process without reaching a decision raises questions about the fairness of due process in such cases.

UNITED SIKHS reached out to the Department of State in Washington D.C. several months ago to address this matter. The State Department acknowledged the issue and raised Mr. Singh's case with the US Embassy in London.

This unjustified delay has left Mr. Singh in a state of uncertainty while his brother's health continues to decline. UNITED SIKHS is troubled by the absence of a proportional due process mechanism, which has kept Mr. Singh waiting for a resolution for over two years. The lack of agency-level due process and review mechanisms may contribute to the unchecked authority in handling such matters.

Abrupt Revocation of Sikh's NEXUS membership by US's CBP Enrollment Center on US-Canada Border

NEXUS is a travel program that makes cross-border trips between Canada and the US more convenient for trusted and frequent travelers. It's a membership program that is renewed every 5 years. It may not be renewed if the customer has new circumstances that questions or challenges his or her trustworthiness.

However, we are observing that for some Sikhs, without any change in circumstances, their membership is being revoked abruptly. Sometimes, the membership won't get renewed. Then, the Enrollment Center provides no reasons that may justify the revocation. On certain occasions, UNITED SIKHS attempts to reach out to the Center but to no avail because there is no established personalized channel of communication for such kinds of issues. Absent any justification or some form of agency level due process, one may have to presume that the revocation is arbitrary. There

is also no convenient procedure to request the review of the revocation without waiting months and months.

No Fly List – The Case of Mr. Ravinder Singh and His Family Members, Naturalized American Citizens

Mr. Ravinder Singh, a Sikh Indian man, previously resided in the UAE under an investment visa. While living in Abu Dhabi, Mr. Singh had been issued tourist visas to visit his family members and attend a wedding event in Canada. However, his international travels were repeatedly disrupted, presumably due to his status on the US No Fly List. In 2017, Mr. Singh applied for a US visa to visit his sister, Kulbinder Kaur. Regrettably, his application remained under "administrative processing."

Mr. Singh's son, who resides in New Jersey and attends medical school in New York, was recently diagnosed with a rare disease—End Stage Kidney Disease IgA Nephropathy—and required a kidney transplant. Mr. Singh had intended to visit his son, possibly traveling to Canada since he holds a Canadian visa. However, he was denied boarding as his flight was scheduled to pass over the US from Heathrow, presumably due to his no-fly status.

All family members who are US citizens and related to Mr. Ravinder Singh face similar challenges with their travels. Most recently, in 2024, a close family member of Ravinder Singh traveled to India for vacation. Upon his return to the US, he underwent additional immigration scrutiny at JFK Airport, during which he was questioned about Mr. Ravinder Singh, and his phone was temporarily seized by immigration officers without his consent. After examining his phone, the immigration officer questioned him about Ravinder Singh.

United Sikhs conducted due diligence in investigating this matter and found that Mr. Singh has a clean criminal record in all the places and countries where he has lived. United Sikhs obtained certificates from authorities in India and the UAE certifying Mr. Singh's clean record.

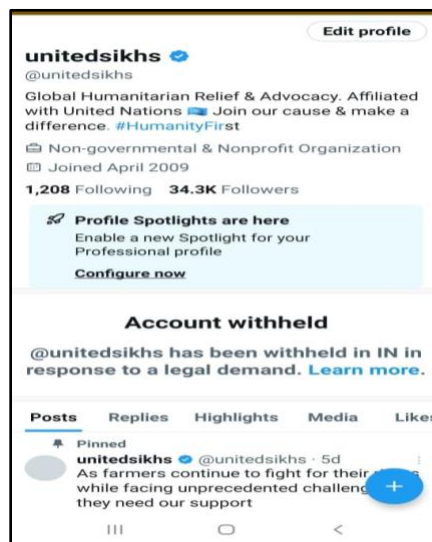
Poor management of No-FLy List

Challenges faced by Mr. Singh and his relatives in the US are likely due to unreasonable errors and poor management in maintaining the No-Fly List concerning Sikhs. We suspect that

misidentification or misplacement of identities may contribute to this issue. Furthermore, lack of due process and notices exacerbates the problem. There appears to be a lack of genuine willingness to re-evaluate the situation and take immediate remedial action at the agency level.

SIKHS FREE SPEECH ON GIANT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The Sikh Nation has faced censorship on social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter), particularly in India, where accounts have been withheld or restricted. In almost all circumstances, there is no reason or justification provided for withholding Sikhs civil rights leaders and organizations' accounts. Twitter's withholding of Sikh civil rights leaders and its organizations' accounts in India has been a source of serious concern, as it restricts the Sikhs ability to freely express their opinions and share information.



UNITED SIKHS has been actively involved in addressing this issue, advocating for transparency and fairness in Twitter's actions. We have engaged with Twitter's Global Government Affairs to seek clarification on the basis for withholding Sikh accounts and to request copies of the executive orders from the Government of India that led to these actions. By working to hold Twitter accountable and ensure that the rights of Sikhs are protected on the platform, UNITED SIKHS is fighting against censorship and working towards a more open and inclusive online environment.

UNITED SIKHS is committed to standing up for the rights to privacy and free expression of Sikhs globally to the fullest extent possible, under relevant laws. We seek a transparent report on Government requests that would infringe those rights.

In fact, it is true that “Free speech is not a free pass.”⁵³ Viral spread of harmful disinformation, misinformation, and incitement of violence result in real world harm. However, such reasons shall not be a pretext in order to breach the principles of free speech as it seems the case that, in an overwhelming number of cases, Twitter and the government of India agree to withhold our accounts for no apparent justification or reason. As an international humanitarian and civil rights organization, UNITED SIKH’S projects and programs in India continue to suffer because of unreasonable and negligent conduct of social media corporations such as Twitter (X) who has a policy of complying to the authoritarian request of the government of India to withheld accounts belonging to Sikhs leaders and their organizations.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Transnational repression is a pressing global issue, whereby foreign governments target individuals, often from their own diaspora communities, residing in other countries. These individuals are targeted for expressing political dissent, advocating for human rights, or engaging in activities perceived as a threat to their home country's regime. The Sikh community, like many others, has been subject to such repression, notably in the context of India.

On **Jun 22, 2023** merely four days after the assassination of a Canadian activist on Canadian territory, Dr. Pritpal Singh, received an abruptly short two-minute call from an FBI representative named "Jason," issuing a 'duty to warn' notice. Subsequent attempts by the 70-year-old father to verify the call's authenticity proved futile when the FBI's reception could not confirm "Jason's" identity. This experience of uncertainty was not isolated, as two of Dr. Singh’s associates received similar calls and were left in doubt for over a week about the legitimacy of the call.

⁵³ UN Letter to Elon Musk

On **Sept 9, 2023** the Stockton Gurdwara — the historical place of Sikh worship in America — became the scene of an unsettling encounter. A man, purporting to act on behalf of the Indian government, attempted to compel the Gurdwara's president and priest into compliance with what is believed to be the demands of the Indian regime. The confrontation was captured on video alongside the individual's vehicle license plate. The Gurdwara leadership shortly reached out to the FBI. The response by the FBI was for the Gurdwara leadership to initiate a follow-up meeting with the "Indian agent," with no immediate action to interview people or any attempt to collect video evidence. It was only after Mr. Ginni Singh's persistent efforts and outreach to a senior FBI official in Washington D.C., facilitated by personal contacts, that the local FBI finally reached out—6 weeks after the incident.

RECOMMENDATION - Terrorism Research Center (TRC) is a National Security Issue

The Terrorism Research Center (TRC) is a non-profit think tank focused on investigating and researching global terrorism issues through multi-disciplinary collaboration amongst a group of international experts.⁵⁴

TRC is not merely a crime against a diaspora element. It is a threat to the national sovereignty of the United States. Therefore, it is imperative to approach this problem head-on at its root and at the place where it came from - foreign land. That means, it requires the US foreign policy practitioners of the State Department and investigative institutions such as the FBI to understand the motive or intent of the perpetrators.

A comprehensive grasp of the political landscape surrounding the Sikh quest for self-determination is critical for identifying the *intent* behind actions of perpetrators (*mens rea* of the perpetrator - a key factor in successfully investigating TRC.

TRC typically involves crimes commissioned directly by foreign governments or indirectly through agents against dissenting diaspora members. Understanding the motive behind a foreign government's

⁵⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_Research_Center

intent to commit such crimes is the first step towards launching a successful investigation. Hence, comprehending the Sikh community's aspirations, which are deeply intertwined with their right to self-determination, is vital for addressing TRC effectively. This necessitates that the FBI's TRC unit is well-versed in the cultural and political nuances of the victim's backgrounds and their causes.

Effective response to Terrorism, Narcotics, and Crime (INR/TNC) requires Synchronization of efforts to tackle domestic national security issues with foreign policy practice.

By familiarizing itself with the evolution of the Sikh Right to Self-Determination, the FBI can align its investigative efforts with US foreign policy objectives, since addressing TRC without synchronizing with the State Department's foreign policy strategies would be less effective. At the core of US foreign policy is the safeguarding of national and international interests, which encompasses promoting peace, economic cooperation, and robust diplomacy.

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PAKISTAN

PROFILE

- Sikhs population number in Pakistan: Currently Total Sikh Population in Pakistan approximately 35,000 to 40,000.⁵⁵
- Number of Gurdwara: There are around 160 Gurdwaras across Pakistan but only 20 to 25 Historical Gurdwaras are in functional Condition⁵⁶



INTRODUCTION

According to the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, there are just 15,000-20,000 Sikhs estimated to be left in Pakistan of which some 500 Sikh households are in Peshawar.⁵⁷ The Number of Sikh individuals murdered in Pakistan in the last 10 years has risen to 15 Sikhs with in 2022 there were 2 Sikhs murdered and in 2023 2 Sikhs murdered and 1 injured. The motive of the perpetrator is Religious radicalism, Hate Crime, Ransom. Actors and entities involved in the perpetration (commission and omission) are **Non-State Actors** (Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) and Tehreek Taliban Pakistan) and **State actors** (Government's failure to investigate and prosecute; and Government's lack of willingness to protect Sikhs and failure to provide effective remedy)

In Pakistan, there are still a number of issues with human rights, raising concerns on both the domestic and international levels. The fundamental right to free expression is continuously undercut by a level of persistent violence, threats, and restrictions faced by journalists and activists,

⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_Pakistan

⁵⁶ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/only-20-24-of-160-historical-gurdwaras-in-pakistan-functional/articleshow/87079011.cms>

⁵⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/sikh-community-faces-existential-crisis-in-pakistan-101654007355224.html>

with freedom of the press and speech struggling in the face of danger.

FORCED CONVERSION TO MUSLIM

The Sikhs in Pakistan are in a vulnerable state and have seen a massive decline in population in the last two decades amid rising cases of forced conversions and targeted attacks by the Islamic groups because of their unique religious identifications and their population concentrated in unsafe areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Islamic outfits have made an unlivable environment for religious minorities in Pakistan through targeted killings, abductions and forced conversions. Attacks on Sikhs have become a regular affair in the country, and it has triggered tension among communities.

RELIGIOUS MOTIVATES MURDER

In June and July of 2023, UNITED SIKHS documented an increasing security threat and crime of violence targeting Sikhs in Pakistan. We continue to witness targeted killing of Sikhs in Pakistan by private actors. The Sikh community in Pakistan has been an integral part of the country's history and culture, contributing positively to society in various fields. However, there have been troubling incidents of violence, hate crimes, and attacks targeting Sikhs in recent times, leading to fear and insecurity among the Sikh population. Such incidents not only undermine the fundamental principles of human rights and religious freedom but also have far-reaching implications for communal harmony.

In a brutal incident on May 15, 2022 recently, two Sikh traders--Kuljeet and Ranjit Singh- - were murdered on the outskirts of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, Asian Lite International reported. In a brutal incident on May 15 recently, two Sikh traders - Kuljeet and Ranjit Singh - were murdered on the outskirts of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, Asian Lite International reported. This was the 'twelfth' such incident since 2014 when Sikhs were targeted by extremists in KP province alone.⁵⁸

⁵⁸<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/sikh-community-faces-existential-crisis-in-pakistan-101654007355224.html>

Moreover, in September of 2022, Satnam Singh, a Sikh Unani medicine practitioner was shot down inside his clinic in Peshawar, the report added, citing the local community. The Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) took the responsibility for the attack. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan also strongly condemned the murders and said in a statement, "This is not the first time that the Sikh community in KP has been targeted and we demand that the KP police identify and arrest the perpetrators promptly."⁵⁹

REPRESSIVE BLASPHEMY LAW

Discrimination against religious minorities, particularly Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, continues to be a severe issue, as evidenced by endless stories of persecution and blasphemy. Issues surrounding women's rights still persist, including forced marriages, gender-based violence, and honor killings. Pakistan's blasphemy law under section 295-C of the PPC,⁶⁰ regularly used to prosecute people⁶¹ for their religious convictions, are just another matter that unravels the tale of injustice. Furthermore, marginalized groups still maintain disproportionately limited access to quality healthcare and education,⁶² which serve as the foundations of humanity. It is time to divulge these matters of human rights violations so that Pakistan can achieve a society that runs on the parallels of inclusiveness and equality.

A multifaceted strategy based on national and international actions is required to address Pakistan's most egregious human rights violations. To rescue freedom of expression and press freedom from the clutches of oppression, legislation must first be brought to a level of strength to protect journalists, activists, and members of society against the dangers that are ingrained with the culture of threats and violence. Furthering the guarantees of freedom, collective spaces where individuals can express their opinions without concern of endangerment. However, legislation is not the end;

⁵⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1689912>

⁶⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa330081994en.pdf>

⁶¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/12/pakistans-blasphemy-law-targets-youth-social-media#:~:text=Since%201990%2C%20at%20least%2065,were%20accused%20of%20committing%20blasphemy.>

⁶² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/03/29/nightmare-everyone/health-crisis-pakistans-prisons>

we need to provide normality and acceptance of open dialogue and tolerance among the public.⁶³

Second, comprehensive policies are needed to combat prejudice against religious minorities. Campaigns can encourage interfaith dialogue, raise an understanding of religious diversity, and punish those responsible for hate crimes accountable. Blasphemy Laws, a prevalent phenomenon, need fundamental legislative and social integration changes. Access to work, education, and social integration can increase the power of religious minority communities while lowering their vulnerability to prejudice. Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other religious minorities make up only a small portion of Pakistan's population, which is predominantly Muslim. Unfortunately, minorities frequently experience prejudice and discrimination in several facets of life. For instance, the misuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws - particularly Sections 295-B and 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code - against religious minorities has drawn harsh criticism. Blasphemy accusations frequently target minorities and can result in violence and mob justice.

Thirdly, in order to improve women's rights in Pakistan, comprehensive legislation aimed at putting an end to violence and discrimination against women is required. Laws that exist but are poorly administered need to be strictly enforced for society to face relief from domestic abuse, forced marriages, and honor killings.⁶⁴ Women can be equipped to challenge oppressive social norms⁶⁵ if gender equality is promoted through economic empowerment and education. Concern and advocacy have long been present in relation to gender-based violence, child marriage, education, workforce engagement, and legal discrimination. Although there has been progress in some areas, there are still significant problems and discrepancies. Fostering an atmosphere supporting women pursuing careers in politics and other leadership positions may improve Pakistan's patriarchal society.⁶⁶

⁶³ <https://www.mediasupport.org/pakistan-passes-landmark-law-on-safety-of-journalists/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/20/pakistans-new-law-aims-protect-women-workplace>

⁶⁵ Id

⁶⁶ Id

SIKHS ARE DISCREET VICTIMS OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Pakistan has been the hotbed of international terrorism in the past few decades. International and foreign policies were focused on State actors in the region. However non-State communities such as Sikhs are the discreet victim of non-State terrorism in Pakistan over years.⁶⁷ This is evidenced by the fact that the Sikhs are persecuted in their home country (India) and are without protection in the country of refuge in Pakistan) from attacks directed to them from non-State terrorist acts and actors in the country of refugee. Sikhs, even though direct victim of acts of terrorism, are invisible in the mainstream narratives of security threat in Pakistan

RECOMMENDATION

Establishing diplomatic conversation between international human rights entities such as UNITED SIKHS with the government of Pakistan or their respective Embassies will help to monitor the welfare of the existing Sikh artifacts, monuments, historical shrines and of that the local Sikh community in Pakistan. As an organization committed to promoting peace, understanding, and religious harmony, UNITED SIKHS believes that open and constructive dialogue between communities and governments is vital to address the challenges faced by minority groups in the home country. For example, a continuous meeting with the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington DC with the goal to bring the matter to their attention will increasingly help the plight of Sikhs in Pakistan to come into light.

UNITED SIKHS firmly believes that a collective effort from all stakeholders can bring about positive change and foster an environment where all citizens can live in peace and harmony, irrespective of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. A continued engagement will help establish a common platform and an opportunity to share valuable insights, exchange ideas, and explore ways to work together to ensure the safety and security of the Sikh community in Pakistan. Furthermore, the joint platform can investigate the rising security threats and violence against Sikhs in Pakistan, the measures taken by the Pakistani government to ensure the safety and

⁶⁷ Fear And Anxiety': Pakistan's Minority Sikhs Flee Restive Province In Face Of Rising Violence
<https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-minority-sikhs-flee-khyber-pakhtunkhwa/32614334.html>

protection of the Sikh community, initiatives and strategies to promote interfaith harmony and understanding among all communities in Pakistan, collaborative efforts to foster awareness and education on the importance of religious tolerance and inclusivity.

Relevant stakeholders and international actors in the region should recognize Sikhs minority groups in Pakistan as a group whose existence is threatened; and individual victims of Sikhs should be entered in the victim lists maintained by entities such as USCIRF.

Timely Congressional hearing on the situation of the Sikhs in Pakistan⁶⁸ – Sikhs are the victims of terrorism in the region but obscured from international policy on security - it is important to bring the voice of Sikhs victims to the mainstream policy channels in Washington D.C. with a goal to prevent Sikhs from continuing to be victims of terrorism and suffer discreetly.

⁶⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/>



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