

UK Parliamentary Sikh Advisory Panel Vows to Take Forward National Struggle for Freedom and Justice.

The Sikh Advisory Panel of Westminster cross party group 'Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination' (PNSD) held an impressive annual general meeting at Guru Nanak Gurdwara, High Street Smethwick on Sunday 4th May 2008, immediately after a very successful 'Khalistan Day' conference hosted by the Gurdwara Sahib which is one of the biggest in the UK. The meeting was chaired by Lord Ahmed, Chair of PNSD and attended by leading figures from the Kashmiris, Assamese and Naga peoples, as well as by representatives of all the leading UK Sikh organisations pursuing the struggle for self-determination for the Sikh nation.

PNSD has provided a platform at Westminster for a number of nations seeking to exercise self-determination - a fundamental human right recognised as such by the UN- by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. It promotes this as a process based on international law and as a crucial means of conflict resolution. PNSD, as does the UN, recognises the critical nexus between the denial of self-determination and the systematic abuse of individual human rights. Respect for both collective and individual human rights are seen by it as key to a just and equitable world order.

A number of important messages were received from local parliamentarians who were invited to share their views as to how to address the numerous human rights concerns that had been raised with them by the Advisory Panel. John Spellar MP's message, in relation to the massive human rights abuses suffered by the Sikhs in India since 1984, spoke of the "considerable number of atrocities" that took place and noted that "these events are still deeply felt by the community and there is a strong and legitimate feeling that those responsible at all levels should be brought to justice". It is important he said "not only in the Sikh community, but also for the state of India as it faces up to aspects of its past". Khalid Mahmood MP in his message to the organisers said all UK parliamentarians should uphold self-determination as a means to deliver civil liberties and fundamental human rights to protect the very identities of peoples around the world. He said that the Sikhs, as a nation, were fully deserving of that approach and added that he fully endorsed the Panel's call for international action to bring those guilty of rights violations to be brought to justice in view of the impunity which has protected them to this day.

A message from Roger Godsiff, MP said "self-determination and the respect for human rights is the cornerstone on which all civilised societies are based and we must be prepared to speak out and to take international action through the UN and other international forums to try and ensure that all countries in the world observe these two principles". In a statement issued to the Advisory Panel by John Hemmings, MP said that it was important to consider how minorities are treated by majority communities across the world and that self-determination is relevant to this. In terms of those who campaign for self-determination he stressed that "self-determination does not give any country the right to oppress minorities". Malcolm Harbour, MEP wished the meeting success and pledged that he would ensure that Sikh human rights concerns were raised at the EU's bodies dealing with foreign affairs and human rights.

The Sikh Advisory Panel's activities over the last year were reviewed, including participation in numerous PNSD events at Westminster, organising a briefing to the head of the India Desk at the UK Foreign Office on the legitimacy and history of the Khalistan cause and participation in key briefings to UN bodies and NGOs at the UN in Geneva.

Plans for future activities of the Panel were discussed and will include continuing to raise awareness of the causes of the Indo-Sikh conflict and the means to resolve it - ultimately a UN sponsored plebiscite in Punjab to allow the Sikhs to freely demonstrate to the international community their commitment, formally determined by the Sarbat Khalsa in 1986, to establish a sovereign independent state of Khalistan. The recent public endorsement of Khalistan by the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib, Joginder Singh Vedanti, was applauded by the Advisory Panel. His intervention has already been seen as a serious set back for those who have tried to silence the Sikhs by all available means. An independence referendum, held under international supervision, is the only democratic way forward towards a settlement of the conflict.

The example of Kosovo is a clear precedent and the meeting warmly appreciated a message of support from Mehmed Stublla, an Imam of the UK Kosovo community: "In a momentous year for the people of Kosovo, when we secured the freedom that is our birthright, I am delighted to extend my goodwill to your gathering on Khalistan Day to commemorate the historic decision taken by the Sikh Nation in 1986 to establish a sovereign state in the Sikh homeland, in accordance with your right in international law. We have, like you suffered oppression as the hands of a state which has lost its legitimacy to govern your people by systematically violating their basic human rights. I wish your people every success in their noble struggle for freedom".

In addition, protection of individual human rights as well as the bringing to justice of those guilty of genocide against the Sikhs will be a key focus for the Sikh Advisory Panel. Next year will be the 25th anniversary of the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms in India, which saw 10,000 butchered in three days of state sponsored carnage - it will be a milestone in the continuing scandal that allows the perpetrators to walk free. Justice Bains spoke of the immediate need to abolish the use of the death penalty which has been used disproportionately against minorities even where the evidence against the accused was poor. Concern was also expressed for Sikhs who continue to be arrested and detained on false charges of terrorism, despite the armed conflict in Punjab subsiding some 16 years ago. The use by the discredited Punjab Police of false sedition charges to arrest, detain and silence Sikh leaders in Punjab who merely call for Sikh rights to be respected was also condemned - it was agreed that this needs to be exposed at international level to show how the democratic rights of the Sikhs have been denied, whatever India's tall claims to democratic credentials might be.

Members of the Panel and the organisations they represent were congratulated for their efforts. In particular there was deep appreciation for Justice (ret'd) Ajit Singh Bains, Convenor of the Punjab Human Rights Organisation. As a leading member of the Panel, he had travelled to the UK specifically for this key meeting and was able to welcome new members Sukhvinder Singh (Sikh Federation, UK) and Pritihpal Singh (Dal Khalsa, Switzerland). They join existing members Balbir Singh (Kar Seva Committee), Amrik Singh Sahota, OBE (Council of Khalistan), Chain Singh (SAD(Amritsar), France), Kashmir Singh (British Sikh Federation), Manmohan Singh (Dal Khalsa). All present, in a display of unity and common purpose that must bode

well for the Sikh nation, agreed to work together and re-double their efforts to protect the Sikh national interest, pursuant to democratic values and international law.

The meeting fully endorsed the Resolutions unanimously passed earlier in the day (see below) by the congregation at the Khalistan Day conference and it was also agreed that steps should be taken to counter the malicious propaganda being put out by Indian agencies to discredit the Sikh freedom struggle. It was noted that the BBC had failed to respond to a request to attend the meeting to discuss its recent File on 4 programme, which was roundly condemned by Sikhs for biased and inaccurate statements concerning the Sikhs and their freedom struggle. Lord Ahmed agreed to take this up with the Director General of the BBC. A similar article in the London Evening Standard was also condemned for its obvious lack of journalistic merit.

Avtar Singh Gill, President of the Gurdwara Management committee, personally thanked all those who attended the meeting and pledged continuing support for PNSD's work

Ranjit Singh Srail,
Administrative Secretary,
'Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination'

**RESOLUTIONS:
KHALISTAN DAY CONFERENCE
ON SUNDAY 4TH MAY 2008
GURU NANAK GURDWARA, HIGH STREET, SMETHWICK.**

1. Today's Panthic gathering affirms its commitment to the establishment of a sovereign independent Sikh state pursuant to the decision of the Sarbat Khalsa of 26 January 1986 and in accordance with international law. In taking forward our just struggle we salute the sacrifices made by hundreds of thousands of Sikh martyrs who have laid down their lives in the face of the genocidal policies of the Indian state.
2. Given the investigations and reports carried out by numerous human rights organisations, we urge the UN Human Rights Council and other UN organs to take effective steps to deal with India's systematic and massive violations of human rights including extra-judicial killings, secret cremations, illegal detentions, torture and state sponsored pogroms and to give severe punishment to the war criminals responsible for these atrocities as well as to ensure that India, as a serial violator of human rights, is not given a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
3. Today's gathering welcomes all Sikh participants as well as the representatives of the other nations, such as the Kashmiris, Nagas and Assamese, who have today joined us and pledged to align with us in defeating oppression and colonialism and who, through their representative panels, will work with PNSD's Sikh Advisory Panel in the UK Parliament to advance that cause.
4. This conference calls on the Indian Government to immediately re-deploy and relinquish control of Sikh army units to Punjab and to withdraw all Sikh forces from

regions where the Indian state is oppressing our fellow nations as an occupying force. The Sikh army should take over security in Punjab from the discredited Punjab Police, so that the Sikh human rights can be properly protected.

5. Today's gathering heartily congratulates the Government of Kosovo which has this year secured freedom and independence its people in accordance with their right of self determination, established the world's newest sovereign state and given great hope to other aspirant nations across the world.

6. This gathering warmly welcomes the recent public assertion of Jathedar Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Singh Sahib Joginder Singh Vedanti Ji, of the Sikh nation's right to establish Khalistan and indeed the certainty of that outcome. We warn the BJP's servants Badal, Makkar and others not to take any action or the security forces to intimidate the Jathedars and call on the UN to stop political suppression in Punjab and, under its supervision, procure a plebiscite in the Sikh homeland to allow the Sikhs to demonstrate to the world their freely determined wish to establish Khalistan.

7. This gathering urges the Western media to treat with great caution the false propaganda of Indian agencies which have sought, in order to distract attention from India's appalling human rights record and suppression, to portray the peaceful and democratic struggle of the Sikhs to establish Khalistan as a terrorist movement. We condemn those journalists who recently have blindly accepted this racist and completely defamatory falsehood.

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