

Sikhs Demand Independence and Release of Political Prisoners

Birmingham, 30 April 2012: Following the recent massive peaceful protests demanding freedom by their brethren in Punjab, including a total shut down of the state on 28 March 2012, an international Conference at one of the largest Gurdwaras in the UK called for the UN to intervene before the violent Indian response leads the region once again in to turmoil and bloodshed. Already Indian security forces have shot at and killed protestors, as well as rounded up Sikh leaders, in an effort to silence a remarkable revival in the calls for an independent sovereign state of Khalistan.

The Conference marked the 26th anniversary of the Declaration of Khalistan on 29 April 1986 following an historic decision of the Sarbat Khalsa (national gathering) earlier that year. The Indo-Sikh conflict has resulted in the deaths of an estimated 200,000 Sikhs since 1984, caused by Indian security forces and state sponsored mobs. Those guilty of directing the violence have been given immunity despite calls by internationally respected human rights bodies for the guilty to be put on trial. Only last month a prime accused, Sumedh Saini, was made head of the Punjab Police.

The planned hanging of Sikh leader Balwant Singh Rajoana, who has been on death row since 1997, triggered the mass protests in March which have been mirrored by large rallies by the Sikh Diaspora in the UK, US and elsewhere. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and many UK politicians have condemned the execution, which has been postponed because of the international outcry. Sikh nationalists have warned India that the consequences of another 'judicial murder' of a Sikh will be huge and India will be solely responsible. The Conference called for the unconditional release of Bhai Rajoana and other Sikh political prisoners.

The Conference, organised by the Council of Khalistan, was addressed by Bhai Rajoana's sister by telephone. Delivering a special message from her brother which re-affirmed his demand for Khalistan, she urged the Sikh nation to hold firm in resisting Indian oppression. Lord Ahmed, Chair of 'Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination,' addressed the Conference in chaste Punjabi and backed the Sikh demand for a UN supervised referendum on Khalistan, citing the exercise of self-determination in East Timor, Kosovo and South Sudan as recent examples of conflict resolution based on this basic tenet of international law.

In a written message Fabian Hamilton MP, Chair of the All Party Group for UK Sikhs, noted that Sikhs have been persecuted in India and called for the international

community to act to protect their rights, so that *“national self-determination for Sikhs is a top priority as well as the basic rights and protections which should be available for all people regardless of their religion. I also believe that an international criminal tribunal should be used for those guilty of war crimes against Sikhs”*.

The Rt Hon John Spellar, MP, a shadow foreign minister, in his message called on both UK Government and European Union action to put pressure on India to pull back from the execution; he also called on the restoration of an atmosphere in Punjab in which peaceful protests, calling for political demands to be met, are allowed without fear of violence or intimidation. Elfyn Llwyd MP, leader of the Welsh nationalists in the UK parliament, confirmed his party’s opposition to the execution and asserted that he would seek action from the UK Government. John Hemming MP’s message of support backed the Conference’s aims, adding to the voice of a number of other parliamentarians who have voiced concerns in recent weeks over the Bhai Rajoana case.

Prabsharandeep Singh, a leading Sikh academic, delivered the key note address which highlighted sovereignty as a key feature of Sikh belief and practice, evidenced by history. Only the illegal annexation of the Sikh Raj in Punjab by the British in 1849 and the subsequent imposition of Indian rule in 1947, both of which were maintained by force rather than the will of the people, have denied the Sikhs their rightful claim to a nation state. The Indians having committed genocide in 1984, lead to the Sikh declaration of independence on 29 April 1986. Liberating Khalistan he said was the single greatest challenge facing the Sikhs and he noted the need for international support. Mohammad Ghalib, President of Tehreek-e-Kashmir, endorsed the Sikh right to independence and asserted the need for Sikhs and Kashmiris to work together to break the stranglehold of a common aggressor.

Amrik Singh Sahota, OBE, President of the Council of Khalistan sought to reassure all Punjabis that Khalistan would, in accordance with fundamental Sikh values provide a secure and progressive environment for people of all creeds, but warned that extremist Hindu thugs, in the form of Shiv Sena, would be uprooted and called for a world-wide ban on the terrorist group. Shiv Sena has been at the forefront of provocations and anti-Sikh violence in Punjab in recent weeks but no action has been taken against it. It has a long history of anti-Muslim and anti-Christian violence, along with affiliated groups such as the Bajrang Dal and other RSS-inspired outfits.

The Conference was also addressed by several other Sikhs, including veteran campaigner Gurmej Singh Gill, Lovshinder Singh Dalewal, Gurdev Singh Chohan, Raghbir Singh and Jaspal Singh representing UK-based Sikh organisations who have committed to the Khalistan cause. In another message from the Sikh homeland,

Harcharanjit Singh Dhani, President of the prominent Dal Khalsa party, referred to his memorandum to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon delivered last week calling for his intervention to stop the current bout of oppression in Punjab. He thanked the Sikh Diaspora for its role in alerting the world to the plight of the Sikhs and declared "Khalistan is our lifeline", to be secured through peaceful and democratic means.

Resolutions adopted at the event, inter alia, re-affirmed the Sikh nation's strategy to secure self-determination in accordance with international law and outlined plans for a new national assembly which will represent the Sikhs on the world stage pending the liberation of Khalistan.

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

1. This Conference condemns the very recent provocations and aggression by the Indian state, aimed at once again suppressing and intimidating the Sikhs into submission, and urges the international community to urgently take steps to intervene before the Sikh homeland sees a repeat of the massive state terrorism of the 1980s and 1990s. From the planned execution of Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana, the brutal shooting of peaceful Sikh protesters, the arrest without cause of senior Sikh leaders, the sending in of para-military units and the conspiracy with the Shiv Sena to bring terror to the streets of Punjab, India has shown that it remains ready to discard universal and basic human rights standards to crush the legitimate Sikh struggle for freedom. By contrast the Sikhs have demonstrated, by peaceful means and in massive numbers, their commitment to secure freedom by widespread protests and the complete shutdown of Punjab on 28 March 2012, together with the huge response to Bhai Rajoana's call for the Sikh national flag to be displayed as a symbol of sovereignty. We call on the UN to urgently send in human rights monitors so that another genocide of the Sikhs can be averted as they pursue, through peaceful and democratic means, their right to self-determination in accordance with international law.
2. International law grants every nation the right of self-determination by which every nation determines its own political, economic, and cultural destiny. India's constitution brazenly categorises Sikhs as Hindus; India has carried out decades of political repression, forcible suppression and genocide against the Sikhs; India continues to illegally appropriate Punjab's precious river waters and has brought Punjab's economy to bankruptcy. It is changing the demographics so that Sikhs become a minority in their own homeland; it is promoting blasphemers to malign the Sikh religion. It has located nuclear weapons in the Sikh homeland, deliberately making it a target in any nuclear war with Pakistan or China, with whom the Sikhs have no dispute. India's official refusal to accept that Article 1 of the 1966 International

Covenants on Human Rights, which sets out the right of self-determination, is a challenge not only to the Sikhs, Kashmiris, Nagas and other nations occupied by it but also to the UN. The Sikhs declared independence on 29 April 1986 but that lawful step was met with the use of massive, illegal force and the Sikhs have been held 'captive' in their own homeland since. At a time when India holds a temporary seat at the UN Security Council, we call on the UN to hold India to account for its illegal and immoral refusal to allow these nations their basic freedom, which has directly resulted in decades on conflict and hundreds of thousands of lost lives. It is time the UN organised a free and fair plebiscite on Khalistan in the Sikh homeland, so that the will of the people can be formally acknowledged and respected. A similar plebiscite in neighbouring Kashmir will bring peace and democracy to the region as a whole.

3. This gathering calls for the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to punish those who have directed and implemented the genocide of the Sikhs in the period 1984 to 1995. The grotesque abuses which saw the army, police and state sponsored mobs carry out wanton murder, disappearances, torture, rape, secret cremations of victims and other systematic violence have remain unpunished by any court of law. Culprits, who are known to the courts due to the large body of witness testimony as well as the reports of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and numerous commissions of enquiry, roam free and continue to be rewarded with senior political and security posts. The policy of immunity for the guilty has been condemned by the all the world's foremost human rights organisations. Members of the current Indian Government cabinet are amongst the guilty. Just last month, Sumedh Saini, accused of multiple killings of Sikhs was appointed the Director General of the Punjab Police. Justice delayed is justice denied. It is time for these people to stand trial and be punished as war criminals.
4. This Conference calls for the unconditional release of all Sikh political prisoners, including Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana and other prisoners of war. India's undeclared war on the Sikhs forced him to act to stop the genocide in Punjab. He is not and never was a criminal. His incarceration, once military hostilities ended in 1995, is inconsistent with the Geneva Convention which requires prisoners of war to be repatriated to their people. The Akal Takht has honoured him as a 'living martyr' and demanded his release, which the Indian state has refused; the death sentence remains in place despite the recent postponement. No Sikh will rest until he and others are released and take up their rightful place as democratic leaders of the struggle for freedom.
5. This Conference notes that, having failed to represent the Sikh national interest during the traumatic last three decades, neither the Shiromani Gurdwara Parpandhak Committee nor the Punjab Assembly has any meaningful role or legitimacy in resolving

the fundamental problems facing the Sikh nation. It calls on all panthic organisations to form a national assembly to represent the Sikhs on the international stage and take forward the struggle for national self-determination, in order to protect the population, territory and natural resources of the Sikhs. Sikh political prisoners, once released, will take a leading role in the assembly and will have the legitimacy of the backing of the Sikh masses.

6. This Conference salutes the sacrifice of those Sikhs who have laid down their lives and given up their liberty to secure freedom and justice for the Sikhs, including Bhai Jaspal Singh who was shot dead by the Punjab Police last month. Their contribution to the cause will never be forgotten and we pledge that we will maintain the struggle until Khalistan is liberated, so that their dreams can be fulfilled.
7. This Conference calls for a world wide ban on the Shiv Sena as a terrorist organisation. Having led anti-Sikh violence in Punjab last month it has revived its role as the instigator of violence and intimidation against non-Hindus in India. Its ideology and history of communal thuggery is a threat to peace which must be stopped. The Sikhs will dismantle the Shiv Sena's operations in Punjab and end the malignant influence of this organisation in the Sikh homeland.

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