

Sikhs Demand Release of Prisoners of War and Renew Sovereignty Goal over Homeland

Birmingham, UK: On the 27th anniversary of the Declaration of Khalistan in 1986, Sikhs have moved to renew their freedom struggle based on an initiative taken by death row prisoner Balwant Singh Rajoana, who played a major role in ending the Indian military offensive of the 1984 – 1995 period. At a Conference held in Birmingham on 5th May, they also called for the immediate release of all Sikh prisoners of war who, following the end of the armed conflict in 1995, should be repatriated to their people in line with the Geneva Convention and other post-conflict situations such as the peace processes in South Africa and Northern Ireland. In his message to the gathering John Spellar, shadow foreign affairs spokesman, pointed to those precedents as offering the best hope of facilitating a true settlement of the Punjab conflict. John Hemming MP and Richard Burden MP both sent messages deploring India's plans to execute Sikh prisoners.

Bhai Rajoana, declared in 2012 to be a 'living martyr' by the Akal Takht Sahib (highest authority of the Sikh nation), has written to the Indian President in the form of a 'Sikh Sovereignty Petition' urging India's peaceful withdrawal from Punjab, as the Sikhs have determined that independence is the only solution to the Indo-Sikh conflict. His letter cites the decades of betrayal, oppression and genocide suffered by Sikhs since 1947 as well as the abject failure of the Indian judicial system to protect them from the catalogue of abuses. According to Gurdev Singh Chohan, President of the Akali Dal UK, India is doing its best to continue this shameful record as shown by last month's decision of the Supreme Court to uphold the death sentence on Professor Devinderpal and last week's acquittal of Sajjan Kumar, the prime accused of the genocide of November 1984 when 10,000 Sikhs were killed in three days. Bhai Rajoana's sister, Kamaldeep Kaur, addressed the gathering via telephone link and described the Sikh status within India as one of slavery.

India's plans to execute Bhai Rajoana were derailed last year when the Sikhs took out massive protests in India and elsewhere calling for his release and India to quit the Sikh homeland, Khalistan. Lord Ahmed, in a message relayed to the event, praised the Rajoana initiative as being in line with the Sikh right of self-determination, which India must now respect. Fabian Hamilton MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on UK Sikhs, confirmed his support of the Conference's aspirations so that "one day Sikhs can enjoy the freedom of full self determination for their homeland". He lamented that the present Indian leadership was unwilling to listen to the "voice of international conscience" on this issue.

Prabsharandeep Singh, a scholar from Oxford University and the keynote speaker, outlined the degeneration being suffered in Punjab due to the forcible denial of Sikh sovereign rights by India. The alarming problems of political disenfranchisement, economic deprivation, lack of educational, cultural and social development in recent decades were a direct result of the denial of freedom. Local MP, Khalid Mahmood, expressed his concern for that regression which he said, as in Kashmir, will only be reversed when the Sikhs secure freedom.

Khawaja Suleman delivered a message from Syed Ali Geelani, Chair of the All Parties Hurriat Conference in Kashmir, who, as the widely recognised leader of the Kashmiri freedom struggle, gave fulsome support for Khalistan. He maintained that Sikh-Kashmiri solidarity would not be broken by

Indian skulduggery, such as the appalling massacre of 36 Sikhs in Kashmir in March 2000 by Indian forces who then tried to pin the blame on Kashmiris.

The Conference adopted resolutions covering these demands as well as others saluting the sacrifices of Sikh martyrs, the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to punish Indian genocide perpetrators, and the rejection of Indian claims to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Coming at a time of heightened political tensions in Punjab, the Conference aimed to direct policy makers towards a genuine settlement of the Punjab problem.

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**RESOLUTIONS OF SIKH SOVEREIGNTY CONFERENCE,
SUNDAY 5TH MAY 2013, BIRMINGHAM, UK**

SALUTING THE SACRIFICE OF OUR MARTYRS

This Conference salutes those Sikhs who have sacrificed their lives and freedom to counter Indian state aggression. Their sacrifice honoured the cherished traditions of our nation and gave us the self-respect to meet the challenge of this undeclared war. It inspires us to continue the freedom struggle and we vow to pursue their dream of sovereign independence.

RELEASE OF SIKH PRISONERS OF WAR

That armed conflict in Punjab began with the political misadventure of the Indian Government in June 1984, when the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar was invaded— something acknowledged by the recently retired Indian Army chief VK Singh as a “wrong and highly unfortunate political” decision. The brave action taken by Bhai Dilawar Singh, Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana and their associates in 1995, finally brought an end to the genocide of the Sikhs after which the armed conflict subsided.

In accordance with the Geneva Convention, and the precedents set by the South African ‘Peace and Reconciliation’ process and the ‘Good Friday Agreement’ in Ireland, it is time for Sikh prisoners of war to be unconditionally released, not executed. These men are not criminals and never were. This Conference calls for their immediate release, which will enable the two sides to engage in a process to bring a lasting settlement to the conflict. Last year’s abortive efforts to execute Bhai Rajoana and last month’s upholding of the death sentence given to Professor Devinderpal Singh Bhullar by India’s Supreme Court, simply risk a return to hostilities and completely exposes India’s inability to behave as a civilised country.

BHAI BALWANT SINGH RAJOANA’S SIKH SOVEREIGNTY PETITION

This Conference welcomes Bhai Rajoana’s ‘Sikh Sovereignty Petition’ addressed to the Indian President, as a means of peaceably resolving the underlying conflict, in accordance with international law. Decades of betrayal, injustice and genocide - without any redress - have left the Sikhs with one simple political demand – independence, based on the Sikh right of self-determination in their

homeland, Khalistan. India should recognise this legitimate demand, peaceably withdraw its forces and dismantle its illegitimate administration in the territory. India responded to the massive pro-freedom protests called for by Bhai Rajoana in 2012 by killing peaceful protestors on the streets of Punjab. That is a policy doomed to fail and now is the time to engage with the Sikhs in a genuine peace process.

PUNISHMENT OF GENOCIDE PERPETRATORS

The international community was horrified by the acquittal this week of Sajjan Kumar, a prime accused in the genocide of November 1984 when 10,000 Sikhs were killed in three days of massacres in Delhi and elsewhere in India. Despite 29 years of concerted legal action and protest, India refuses to bring to justice those who planned and directed the carnage. Similarly, those responsible for the systematic extra-judicial killings and secret cremations of tens of thousands of Sikhs in Punjab remain immune from legal sanction. This Conference calls for the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to punish those who have carried out these war crimes, as the Indian judicial system has emphatically demonstrated it will not deliver justice.

REJECTION OF PERMANENT INDIAN SEAT ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

This Conference urges the international community to firmly reject India's push for a permanent seat on the UN's Security Council. A serial violator of human rights, a state which officially rejects fundamental UN-backed rights such as the right to self-determination and which cannot even bring itself to sign up to UN's Convention Against Torture, does not have any legitimate claim to sit on that august body. Whilst the international community may wish to engage with India, granting it to power to veto decisions that may be needed in the years ahead to bring peace to Punjab and Kashmir is neither sensible nor justifiable.