

**Rt Hon Theresa May,  
Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
London,  
SW1AA 2AA**

Dear Prime Minister,

**15 August 2016**

**Re: The Punjab and the Indian Union – a referendum to ‘Leave or Remain’**

Let me begin by offering my sincerest congratulations to you on your recent elevation to the head of the UK Government. It has been a remarkable turn of events and I wish you well as you face the challenges ahead. One of those challenges will be the way in which the UK now deals with the international community in the post Brexit era.

In that context I wish to bring to your attention a situation that in many ways mirrors the democratic and constitutional issues that underpinned the UK’s historic decision on 23 June 2016. I would seek your support for the application of the same democratic process so that the Sikhs too may exercise their sovereign rights in their homeland. That homeland - the state of Punjab held within an Indian ‘union of states’ since this very day in 1947 – yearns for the same sovereign control over its laws, borders, security and prosperity as your Government aims to deliver to the people of the UK.

Today’s anniversary of that fateful day in 1947, when the British formally handed our homeland to an independent India marks a tragic milestone for the Sikhs and others in Punjab. The British had identified the Sikhs as one of the three parties with whom the decolonisation process should have been agreed but, in the event, the Sikh position was liquidated. Hundreds of thousands died in a catastrophic partition of Punjab and over half of Sikh property was lost in an episode which traumatised the people for generations. As the Sikhs sought to establish their political, religious and economic rights under the new Indian dispensation they were perceived by the ruling elite as ‘anti-nationals’ and targeted by a blatant policy of denying them any recognition whatsoever.

Sikh nationhood, historically acknowledged by the British and other world powers, was and remains flatly denied by the Indians. The Sikh religion, which the world accepts as a major independent faith, was purportedly demoted, by means of the outrageous Article 25 of the Indian constitution adopted in 1950, to a subset of Hinduism for the purposes of personal law and religion. It is important to note that the Sikhs representatives at the time refused to accept that constitution. That constitution currently applies to some 29 states which – much like the EU – represent more a continent than a viable country. Punjab’s population of nearly 28 million is only 2.3% of India’s total population – you will immediately see why Punjab’s interests have been so easily ignored by an ever more centralised super state.

Countless political struggles to restore Sikh rights were treated as a ‘law and order’ problem to be crushed through massive state oppression. This culminated in the atrocities of 1984 when the Indian army attacked the Harmandir Sahib (or Golden Temple) complex in Amritsar, killing thousands and reducing to rubble sacred shrines. That was followed by the genocide of November 1984 when thousands were massacred by state sponsored mobs in Delhi and other Indian cities. If that was not enough, security forces then eliminated an entire generation of Sikh youth in Punjab in a dirty war conducted in breach of every tenet of human rights and international law. The Indian judicial system has not brought any of the guilty to account and has no intention to do so. Instead, even today, hundreds of Sikh political prisoners remain in jail – many of who have even served their sentences in full.

However, there remains a complete stalemate in terms of even discussing the legitimate Sikh demand for self-determination in their homeland – whether through any international process or pursuant to any bilateral dialogue (there is none).

Today the Indian union wages other forms of warfare on a rapidly disintegrating state of Punjab. Once an economic powerhouse driven by an agricultural revolution brought about by Sikhs, its economy has been driven to bankruptcy as central Indian laws are imposed which force the sale of produce to Indian-only buyers at prices fixed by Indian politicians. As an agriculture – based economy, Punjab's water resources are its life blood but central Indian diktat, in breach of riparian law, takes over 70% of the river waters away to other Indian states – without any payment. As a result, Punjab's farmers are forced to over-utilise ground water which is now predicted to lead to desertification of the region by 2050. The strangulation of the state's resources and agricultural sector has led to an epidemic of farmer suicides.

The state is also being swamped by immigrants from other Indian states, leading to demographic change aimed at making the Sikhs a minority in their own homeland. The anxiety in the UK over uncontrolled EU immigration was of course a major driver of not only the decision to hold a referendum but also the outcome. Politicians and security forces that deal with dissent in Punjab with unfettered aggression are somehow conspicuously unwilling to lift a finger against those that import the drugs that have devastated the state's youth and which are destroying the social fabric of the state. Politicians patronised by the Delhi government are widely seen as the kingpins behind the despicable narcotics river that is flowing through the veins of Punjab's hapless youth.

In a dangerous escalation of the provocation of the Sikhs over recent months, the Sikh scriptures have been desecrated several times. Yet the otherwise iron hand of the security and intelligence forces, have again somehow completely failed to find or punish the culprits. The provocation is seen by Sikhs as an attempt to once again force the state in to violent turmoil.

Political efforts to rescue the state and its people are met with open disregard for democratic norms. Last November a national gathering of the Sikhs appointed leaders who have peaceably sought to hold the Punjab and central governments to account. Those leaders are being arrested and detained in false cases almost on a daily basis, so that Sikhs are denied any opportunity to organise and pursue their rights in any political and democratic manner.

With the exception of this massive oppression that blights the Punjab story, you will perhaps see the parallels between Britain's need for a referendum on leaving the EU and the need for a similar referendum in Punjab. India's supposedly federal constitution does not of course permit such an exercise; however the force of international opinion may help shift attitudes within an Indian elite that seeks deeper diplomatic and commercial ties in capitals around the world. The people of Punjab do not necessarily seek your endorsement of any particular outcome – simply your support for our own "in / out" choice.

The state of Punjab is, like the UK, able to make its way in the world without having its future dictated by a political project which its people have never signed up to. The Sikhs, as the majority within that state, have an undeniable right to self-determination and wish dearly to have the chance to choose between that failed project and a sovereign status for Punjab.

Punjab is headed towards elections in a matter of months and the people want the promise of such a referendum from those who seek power, so that the democratic will of the people may be peaceably ascertained and respected. Given the historic antagonism of the Indian state to such a move, international support for this democratic mandate - to set the destiny of the state and its people - would be helpful and deeply appreciated.

It was one of your illustrious predecessors, Sir Winston Churchill, who recognised the debt owed by the British to the Sikhs for their support during the world wars by saying:

***"British people are highly indebted and obliged to Sikhs...we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result of their timely help, we are able to live with dignity, honour and independence..."***

It is hoped that a desire to redeem that historic debt, coupled with your country's own recent experience of reclaiming sovereignty, will underpin your Government's support to the people of Punjab at this crucial time.

I spoke at an event at the Houses of Parliament on 26 April this year, organised by 'Parliamentarians for National Self-determination and attended by representatives of all the major UK parties, to highlight the need for the return of sovereign power to the people of Punjab. I enclose a copy of my speech from that day which provides further details of the injustice meted out to the Sikhs and Punjab since the so-called independence of 1947. It makes clear that, without sovereign power, the Sikhs face an existential threat in their homeland.

The right of self-determination is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, regarded as the bedrock of international humanitarian law. India has earned the condemnation of the UN itself for formally rejecting that right applies to the nations within its territory. If the EU can respect the UK's sovereign right to determine its future, why should the Indian Union be allowed to forcibly deny the same right to the people of Punjab? The same question has been asked for decades in the neighbouring state of Jammu and Kashmir where the Indian state has flouted even UN Security Council resolutions calling for a plebiscite. The killings of over 50 Kashmiri protestors by Indian security forces in July of this year only serve to demonstrate the urgency of bringing India to account on these issues – the threat to regional peace and security cannot be ignored by any responsible stakeholder in world peace. This is an appropriate time to reconsider the UK's position on India's quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; the risks of giving a state that disregards such basic international norms such a prize should not be disregarded – whatever the implications for trade relationships.

The UK Sikh representatives listed below would like to meet with you or the new Foreign Secretary in order to discuss this request for support in our quest for justice and democracy in the Punjab. I would ask that you kindly respond to us at the address set out below. A number of these representative wrote, on the same subject, to your predecessor on 6 June 2015 and were promised a meeting in the FCO reply but, for some reason, that meeting has not yet been held.

With a new team at the FCO in place, we hope the engagement with the substantial UK Sikh diaspora on these matters will restart on a more positive note.

Yours sincerely,

**Amar Singh Chahal,**  
Senior Advocate,  
Spokesman for Jagtar Singh Hawara, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib

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