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## **Another Sikh Boy Assaulted in City School**

### **New York City School Has a “History of Violence”**

### **City and State Officials Call for Action from Department of Education to Protect Sikh Children**

(New York, NY) June 6, 2008 – New York City’s Sikh community has again suffered the indignity of another hate crime against a Sikh student. This past Tuesday, Jagmohan Singh Premi, a student at Richmond Hill High School, was punched in the face after a student intentionally attempted to remove his *patka* (smaller turban). The perpetrator has a long, documented history of harassing Jagmohan in school, making fun of his *patka* and beard, and attempting to pull off his *patka*.

Jagmohan, a student at Richmond Hill High School in Queens, New York, was sitting in class when a student partially untied his *patka*. With his *patka* untied --- and with his teacher in the classroom --- Jagmohan tried to quickly secure it. At that moment Jagmohan’s tormentor punched him in the face with a key between his knuckles.

Doctors stated that Jagmohan has a facial contusion as a result of the attack. In addition he has a possible orbital fracture. He will have a follow-up appointment in the coming days.

“I am sad this is happening in America. I want to go to school to learn,” said **Jagmohan Singh**, the victim.

Jagmohan’s tormentor has a long history of harassing him at school. He pulled on Jagmohan’s beard in class and squeezed his *jurdha* (hair top knot). He continually made fun of Jagmohan’s *patka* and *jurdha*, asking Jagmohan if he ever washed his hair and demanding that Jagmohan remove his *patka* and show him his hair.

Jagmohan reported this harassment to teachers, but the tormentor was not stopped by teachers or administrators at Richmond Hill High School. Though the tormentor had been suspended earlier this year specifically because he tried to remove Jagmohan’s *patka*, he continued to harass Jagmohan during their shared classes. That harassment culminated in Tuesday’s violence.

“Fed up. That is the only way I can describe how we feel,” said **Amardeep Singh, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition**. “How many more meetings is it going to take before our children are safe? How many more press conferences? How many more calls from distressed Sikh parents because the schools can’t do their job? How many more reports by the Sikh Coalition like ‘Hatred in the Hallways’? How many? I personally handed the Commissioner a folder in July 2007 that listed Richmond Hill High School as a ‘problem school’ for Sikh children. What action was taken? It clearly was not enough to spare Jagmohan a school year of torment. This is inexcusable. We’re fed up and our patience is running thin. The Department needs to give the Sikh community a plan to protect the Sikh community from bias in

schools and we need that plan now.”

The Coalition has documented harassment of Sikh children specifically at Richmond Hill High School since June of 2007 when we released our report "[Hatred in the Hallways](#)" on bias against Sikh school children in New York City. On July 16, 2007, [the Coalition directly raised the issue of anti-Sikh harassment at Richmond Hill High School at a meeting with Schools Chancellor Joel Klein](#) in materials submitted to the Chancellor and his staff at that meeting.

In April 2008, the Sikh Coalition discussed Richmond Hill High School in its report "[Making Our Voices Heard: A Civil Rights Agenda for New York City Sikhs](#)." Page 10 of that report specifically lists Richmond Hill High School under the heading “Problem Schools.” The Coalition found that over half of all Sikh students at Richmond Hill High who responded to our survey reported being harassed at school.

“It’s utterly incredulous that the Department of Education fails to acknowledge the problem of harassment of students in our public schools, said **Council Member John Liu (D-Flushing)**. Just a year ago, Harpal Singh Vacher was attacked in a public school, and yet the DOE has lifted narry a finger to address this persistent problem. The DOE has to stop turning a blind eye towards this harassment against students in public schools. Not only is the Department failing to secure a learning environment it is putting students in peril.”

The Sikh Coalition is outraged by what happened to Jagmohan Singh. His school has a history of violence and harassment against Sikh students, which has been documented by the Sikh Coalition. The Department of Education is aware of our findings and yet Jagmohan was tormented for months because of his faith. This is simply not acceptable.

#### Background:

Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion, with approximately 21 million adherents worldwide. Under the principals of their faith, Sikhs are mandated to leave all hair on their bodies uncut, wrapping the hair on their heads underneath a turban. In the years since 9/11, misperceptions about this appearance have led to hate attacks against Sikhs across the country.

For more information about Sikhs, go to [www.sikhcoalition.org/InfoMedia.asp](http://www.sikhcoalition.org/InfoMedia.asp).

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