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It's Happened Again: Sikh Girl's Hair Cut By Fellow Student in New York City School; Sikhs March Through Streets of Richmond Hill in Protest

(New York, NY) June 30, 2008 – Dismayed Sikhs, stung by two recent incidents of hate crimes against Sikh public school students, marched through the streets of Richmond Hill, Queens today to protest attacks on Sikh children in city schools.

On June 9, Gurprit Kaur, a student at Public School 219 in Flushing, Queens, discovered that another student had cut off a portion of her religiously-mandated uncut hair and discarded it. This is the second major attack on Sikh public school student in June. On June 3, Jagmohan Singh Premi was punched in the face after a student intentionally attempted to remove his *patka* (smaller turban).at Richmond Hill High School. In addition, [during May 2007 a Sikh boy's hair was forcibly cut](#) by another student in a hate crime.

“These attacks on Sikh children are extremely disturbing,” said **Amardeep Singh**, Executive Director of Sikh Coalition. “Sikh children and their articles of faith continue to be the special targets of attack. When will attacks on Sikh children in particular end? We will do whatever we can, including taking to the streets, to stop this from happening again.”

City Sikhs and their allies marched today in the hundreds to Richmond Hill High School, the site of the brutal June 3 assault on Jagmohan Singh Premi. March participants demanded that the city take action to specifically protect Sikh students from bias-based harassment.

The Sikh Coalition has found that Sikh children are particularly vulnerable to bias-based harassment. This past April, the Sikh Coalition released a [civil rights report](#), “Making Our Voices Heard: A Civil Rights Agenda for New York City Sikhs,” which found that more than 60% of over 400 Sikh students that the Coalition surveyed had suffered bias-based harassment or violence in city schools.

While the Sikh community continues to express grave concerns about the safety of its children in city schools, the Department of Education and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein is beginning to appropriately respond to the problem of bias-based bullying against all children in city schools. On June 6, Chancellor Klein personally expressed regret to Jagmohan Singh Premi, the victim of a bias-based attack at Richmond Hill High School.

In addition, on June 6, Chancellor Klein announced that he had recently ordered “the drafting of a new Chancellor's regulation that incorporates recommendations from the Sikh Coalition.” Chancellor Klein also said on June 6 that the Department will "distribute an anti-bias brochure to every middle and high school student in the City that defines harassment, advises students of their rights, and outlines

appropriate actions in response to acts of harassment.” In addition, Chancellor Klein said that the Department will expand its “incident reporting system to comprehensively track bias-related incidents in our schools beginning in September.”

The Sikh Coalition commends the Department of Education and Chancellor Klein for pledging to create a system to monitor and address incidents of bias-based bullying in city schools. This announcement by the Chancellor, while short of the protections called for in the Dignity in All Schools Act (passed by the City Council in 2004), is a major step forward in the fight to protect all students from biased-based harassment in city schools.

Nevertheless, the Sikh Coalition calls on the Department of Education to enact a plan to protect Sikh children specifically from bias-based harassment in city schools. It is the Sikh community’s intent to continue marching in larger and larger numbers until steps are taken to protect Sikh children in particular from bias-based harassment.

Based on the Sikh Coalition’s April civil rights report, which surveyed over 400 Sikh children, and found that more than half suffered bias-based harassment, it is clear that Sikh children need particular help to overcome ignorance in city schools. The Sikh Coalition calls on the Department of Education to inform and train teachers on the particular dangers faced by Sikh students. The Coalition also calls on the Department to teach students about Sikhs and Sikh concerns in order to reduce bias and bigotry.

Council Member John C. Liu, a member of the Council's Education Committee, stated: "The Department of Education's continuing inaction in the face of repeated bias attacks in our public schools is utterly reprehensible. The recent assault on Gurprit Kaur and other students is outrageous -- not only because of the bigotry and hate involved, but because the DOE refuses to acknowledge the magnitude of this persistent problem. Just weeks ago, Jagmohan Singh Premi was physically assaulted after being taunted about his faith, and Harpal Singh Vacher was attacked in a similar assault a year ago. In both cases, the DOE ignored warning signs and pleas for help from the victimized students. By turning a blind eye towards harassment in public schools, the DOE has failed to provide a secure learning environment and is putting our students in peril. In this case, the DOE is as culpable as the individual who actually perpetrated this attack against Gurprit."

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.

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