



## **Press Release**

### **Sikh Coalition Takes Root in the Heart of the West Coast Sikh Community**

#### **New Office Opening Marks Historic Occasion for Sikh Community**

(Fremont, CA) September 11, 2008 – The Sikh Coalition yesterday launched its new Western Region office, making a renewed commitment to protect Sikh civil rights from coast to coast. At an open house this evening, the group introduced its work and vision to members of the Sikh American and Bay Area communities.

Born out of the violent backlash against Sikhs in the aftermath of 9/11, the Sikh Coalition has had 7 successful years operating from its national office in New York City. There, the Coalition has succeeded in challenging discriminatory employment policies of the New York Police Department and the Metropolitan Transportation Association, representing Sikh hate crime victims, and, most recently, leading the charge against bias-based harassment in New York City schools.

While the Coalition has always assisted Sikhs from across the country, the opening of this new office creates a permanent presence for Sikh civil rights activists here in the Bay Area, home to the nation's largest Sikh population.

A host of city, state, and federal government representatives were in attendance to show their support for the Coalition's work. In a statement to the group, Congressman Mike Honda said "I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to the Sikh Coalition and their supporters for their dedication to protecting Sikh civil rights." State Senator Ellen Corbett commended the Sikh Coalition for its leadership and welcomed the organization to the Bay Area.

Sikh Coalition staff and board members at the event expressed their vision for the new initiative. "Because of Sikhs' long history in the Bay Area, we have strong roots and a record of activism here," said Neha Singh, Western Region Director. "I want to build on that energy so that every Sikh's religious rights are protected and so that we see Sikhs engaged in each level of government in California."

The event was well attended by members of the Sikh American community. Many had heard of the Sikh Coalition's successes on the East Coast, and were eager to see them replicated here. In the two short months that the Coalition has been here, the group has already succeeded in working with San Francisco International Airport to address issues with searches of Sikhs' turbans at security.

The Sikh Coalition would like to thank Congressman Mike Honda, Congresswoman Jackie Speier, Congressman Pete Stark, California Senator Ellen Corbett, Mayor Mark Green, Mayor Jose Estevas, Council Member Anu Natrajan, Council Member Bill Quirk, Council

Member Bob Wieckowski, TSA Federal Security Director Edward Gomez and Chief Craig Steckler for their representation at the event. The Coalition would also like to thank the many volunteers and funders without whom this office would never have been possible.

Background:

The Sikh Coalition is the nation's largest Sikh civil rights organization. It was created shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in response to the widespread harassment, beating and even killing of Sikhs because of their appearance. Since then, the Coalition has represented Sikhs in a number of legal actions involving their articles of faith, including employment discrimination, hate crimes, and access to public places.

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