Message from Executive Director & Board Chair

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!

All of us were affected by the tragedy that took place in Oak Creek, Wisconsin earlier this year. The outpouring of support to the local Oak Creek Sangat from the Panth worldwide was in the true spirit of Sikhi. In the days, weeks and months that have followed we have come together with determination to seize this opportunity to shape a positive image of Sikhs in America. It has been a difficult time, but we know that the spirit of Chardi Kala and our strong determination will guide us in building a brighter future.

2012 has been the most productive year of the Sikh Coalition, with significant accomplishments in each of our four programmatic areas: legal, advocacy, education and community development.

It is Dasvandh from committed activist donors that makes possible the Sikh Coalition’s high-impact community efforts. Fostering change at the national level is neither easy nor cheap. The Coalition is encouraged by our collective 2012 achievements and impact made possible by generous support from donors like you.

The Sikh Coalition is a tax-exempt and Better Business Bureau accredited non-profit organization and requires your financial support to continue our trailblazing work. The breadth and impact of these programs are completely dependent upon your investment. Consider setting up a monthly recurring donation and make the fight for Sikh rights part of your Dasvandh.

As always, we encourage all Sikhs to practice their faith fearlessly. Together we can keep the Khalsa strong for generations of Sikh Americans to come.

Chardi Kala!

Sapreet Kaur, Executive Director
Narinder Singh, Board Chair

Sikh Coalition in a Snapshot

Mobilized over 150 organizations to secure a historic U.S. Senate hearing on hate crimes and domestic extremism following the Oak Creek tragedy

AB1964 - the nation’s strongest workplace religious freedom law - passed by a 99 to 10 vote in California

FlyRights downloaded over 14,000 times

24 Sikh Coalition Advocates took over 250 actions in support of civil rights in 18 months

Responded to over 850 requests for legal assistance in the last 5 years

Sikh Presenter’s Course graduates delivered over 150 Sikh Awareness presentations to 9,000 Americans

Over 1,000 Sikh Awareness presentations to school districts for California Sikh Awareness Month

Over 700 Sikh youth attended anti-bullying seminars led by the Junior Sikh Coalition

Over 12,000 mentions in media including:
On August 5, 2012, a gunman attacked the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six sangat members and injuring several others. It was one of the worst hate crimes in recent American history.

Tragedies like this underscore the need for strong Sikh institutions capable of mobilizing resources, leveraging government officials, engaging with the media, and empowering the community to effectively respond to emergencies.

- Within 1 hour, the Sikh Coalition partnered with the White House and U.S. Justice Department to respond to the tragedy.
- Within 12 hours, the Sikh Coalition appeared on CNN and other media outlets sharing Sikh values and demanding action.
- Within 24 hours, three Sikh Coalition members arrived in Oak Creek to assist the community.
- Within the first week, the Sikh Coalition was cited or quoted in over 10,000 media outlets responding to the Oak Creek tragedy.
- Within a month, over 35 Sikh Coalition staff, board members, and volunteers helped the local community respond to media requests, navigate the legal system, and address its social and emotional needs.

Oak Creek - Strength and Dignity in Tragedy

Our Crisis Response in a Snapshot

- Media – With over 10,000 media hits in a week, the Coalition provided articulate, professional representation on major media outlets like CNN, the New York Times, Washington Post, Associated Press, NBC, PBS, and Time.
- Advocacy – The Sikh Coalition persuaded 19 U.S. Senators to write to the FBI calling for anti-Sikh hate crime tracking and secured a historic U.S. Senate hearing on hate crimes and domestic extremism, featuring the first-ever testimony by a Sikh before the U.S. Senate.
- Education – The Sikh Coalition created a toolkit on “How to Increase the Visibility and Appreciation of Sikhs.” The toolkit includes a professionally-reviewed PowerPoint presentation and has full-time Sikh Coalition staff backing the effort.
- Community Organizing – The Sikh Coalition created a “Community Response Resource” packet to help guide the organizing of dozens of interfaith vigils across America. These packets included professionally-vetted media talking points.
- Community Health – In collaboration with an organically-created group called the Sikh Healing Collective and other Sikh organizations, the Sikh Coalition helped produce a guide on “Helping Your Child Understand the Wisconsin Gurdwara Shooting.”
- Legal – The Coalition continues to provide or coordinate the provision of critical legal guidance to the Oak Creek community on issues such as crime victim compensation, immigration law, and probate law.

Our Holistic Response

The Sikh Coalition’s work in response to Oak Creek was necessary and needed. It is an important reminder that when tragedy strikes, the Panth needs a credible, professional organization to respond.
In response to the Oak Creek tragedy, the Sikh Coalition rallied more than 150 organizations to call for a United States Senate hearing on hate crimes and hate groups in the U.S. Within a month, on September 19, 2012, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights granted our request.

Over 400 members of the public, mostly Sikhs, attended the hearing, which featured the courageous testimony of Harpreet Singh Saini, whose mother lost her life during the Oak Creek tragedy. Harpreet made history by becoming the first Sikh to testify before the United States Senate. Notably, Senate Assistant Majority Leader Richard Durbin also paid tribute to the Oak Creek community by displaying photographs of those who lost their lives: Paramjit Kaur Saini, Sita Singh, Ranjit Singh, Prakash Singh, Suvegh Singh and Satwaint Singh Kaleka.

One of the issues raised at the hearing was the need for the FBI to track hate crimes against Sikhs. The Sikh Coalition first made this request in January 2011. Since then, over 110 members of Congress, and the Civil Rights Division and Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice, have endorsed the Sikh Coalition’s request.

Sikh Coalition Spearheads Historic U.S. Senate Hearing

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National Acclaim for FlyRights Mobile App

To national fanfare, the Sikh Coalition released its FlyRights mobile phone application in May 2012. The innovative phone application allows anyone to quickly file an official report of airport profiling with the TSA in real time. The Associated Press, New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, CNN.com, Los Angeles Times, National Public Radio, ABC News, NBC, and Fox covered the launch of the event, raising unprecedented levels of awareness about Sikhs and the leadership role that Sikhs are playing in protecting civil rights for all Americans.

To date, FlyRights has been downloaded over 14,000 times and was ranked among the Top 20 Free Travel Apps on Apple’s iTunes and the Top 10 most popular “Travel and Local” apps in the Android market.

“Professionally designed, easy controls, and lots of information about a passenger’s rights (even if you are not a Sikh, you should download the app). Make sure you scan the submission form and get familiar with the data you need to collect if you are profiled at an airport. Very nice!!”
- Customer Review in iTunes Store

“[O]n Sunday, August 5, 2012, a white supremacist fueled by hatred walked into our local Gurdwara with a loaded gun. He killed my mother, Paramjit Kaur, while she was sitting for morning prayers. He shot and killed five more men – all of them were fathers, all had turbans like me. ... I want to tell the gunman who took her from me: You may have been full of hate, but my mother was full of love. She was an American. And this was not our American dream.”
- Harpreet Singh Saini
On September 8, 2012, California Governor Jerry Brown made history by signing the Workplace Religious Freedom Act (AB1964) into state law. Proposed, drafted, and sponsored by the Sikh Coalition, the new law provides workers in California the nation’s strongest protections against workplace religious discrimination.

“The Sikh Coalition’s legal expertise and coast-to-coast mobilization efforts were absolutely critical to AB 1964’s success. As the bill’s co-sponsor, Sikh Coalition staff provided invaluable support as AB 1964 made its way through the legislative process. More importantly, the partnerships forged among state and national civil rights organizations and the thousands of community members and volunteers—both Sikh and non-Sikh alike—will have lasting benefits for the future. I am humbled to have been part of this effort.”
- Assembly Member Mariko Yamada

AB1964 passed by a 99 to 10 vote. The Sikh Coalition is extremely proud of this achievement because it proves that Sikhs can play a leadership role in promoting the civil rights of all Americans, regardless of their religion.

During the multi-month campaign, the Sikh Coalition:
- Empowered 1,300 individuals to send more than 3,000 petition messages to California lawmakers
- Testified or enabled community members to testify at 4 separate legislative hearings
- Partnered with 17 interfaith and civil rights organizations to build support for the bill
- Communicated with all 120 offices in the California legislature to create awareness about the bill
- Organized direct meetings between constituents and 8 legislative offices during Sikh Advocacy Day
- Generated major media coverage in the LA Times, Washington Post, and Associated Press
The Sikh Coalition has taken its education work from New York City to Fresno, California and everywhere in between! In February 2012, every school in New York City was encouraged to celebrate Respect For All week by hosting diversity appreciation programs to combat bullying. With the help of our Sikh Presenter’s Course graduates, the Sikh Coalition delivered presentations on Sikhs to over 4,000 students in New York City. These events are indicators to the community that large institutions are supporting the inclusion of Sikhism in our schools. It is our wish that by telling our neighbors about our faith and why we keep our external identity, this will lead to respect and appreciation for our Sikh students.

This year, the California state legislature passed a resolution that declared November as Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month for the entire state. School districts in Elk Grove, West Contra Costa, and New Haven also did the same, as did the City of San Jose.

Spreading Education About Sikhs Coast to Coast

In California, the Sikh Coalition led a state-wide campaign providing volunteers and resources, and helped host events in the Bay Area, Fresno, Yuba City, Sacramento, Stockton, Bakersfield, Manteca, San Jose and several other cities.

1. Over 50 school presentations were organized state-wide, thanks to the Bay Area Sikh Presenter’s Course graduates, reaching thousands of teachers.
2. Over 15 school districts received Sikh awareness presentations for their faculty and/or Superintendents in October and November 2012.
3. The Sikh Coalition contacted over 30 California gurdwaras to provide educational resources, and encourage them to open their doors and host events for their fellow American community members.
4. Over 1,000 Sikh Awareness posters, created by the Sikh Coalition, were distributed throughout the state and displayed in schools, public libraries, and county offices.
5. The Sikh Coalition was featured in a dozen media outlets about Sikh Awareness Month, including KFOG, a Bay Area radio station and CBS.

To request a copy of this Sikh Awareness poster, please email education@sikhcoalition.org

Do you want to spread awareness about Sikhs? The Sikh Coalition provides many resources for Sikhs to use in their efforts to spread awareness and create appreciation for Sikhs in their local communities. Please visit http://sikhcoalition.org/resources/sikh-awareness for more information. Through these educational efforts, we hope to see a reduction in bias and discrimination against our community. If you need specific resources or have additional questions, please contact education@sikhcoalition.org.

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Jakaras were heard in the White House in June 2012 during a briefing on Sikh civil rights issues in the heart of the federal government. The briefing, a historic first, was organized in collaboration with the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the White House Office of Public Engagement at the request of the Sikh Coalition.

Sikh leaders from New York, California, New Jersey, Texas, Ohio, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Virginia, Indiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and even Canada traveled to Washington DC for the event. The assembled group included Advocates from the 2011 and 2012 classes of the Sikh Coalition’s Sikh Advocate Academy.

They began their day with an early morning tour of the East Wing of the White House. The Sikh leaders then proceeded to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building for a briefing on Sikh civil rights issues from leaders of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Transportation Security Administration, and Department of Education. The assembled community members enthusiastically questioned federal agency officials after each of their presentations. They shared critical feedback and ideas on how the federal government can better connect with and serve the Sikh community.

In June 2012, the Sikh Coalition graduated another class of dedicated community volunteers through its Sikh Advocate Academy. Launched in 2011, the Sikh Advocate Academy is a groundbreaking initiative to train community volunteers to pursue social justice through government engagement, media engagement, and alliance building. Since then, 24 participants have received intensive weekend trainings from Sikh Coalition staff, networked with representatives from national civil rights organizations, and created awareness about Sikh civil rights issues in the U.S. Congress.

Only weeks after completing their training this summer, the Sikh Coalition Advocates responded to the Oak Creek tragedy by spearheading media engagement projects nationwide. The Advocates were featured in 25 media articles around the nation, thus creating Sikh awareness among thousands of Americans.

In the last eighteen months, Sikh Coalition Advocates have taken more than 250 actions in support of the civil rights mission of the Sikh Coalition, including essays for major news publications such as CNN, NPR, and the Sacramento Bee; meetings with Congressional offices to promote civil rights; and grassroots surveys of hundreds of Sikh youth nationwide to address the problem of school bullying.

Sikh Advocate Academy Produces Tangible Results

White House Holds First-Ever Briefing on Sikh Civil Rights Issues
The Sikh Coalition successfully obtained a variance (exception) for Mr. Navraj Singh Banga, a restaurant owner in Duluth, Georgia, from state health regulations to wear his kara while preparing food. Georgia health regulations prohibit restaurant food preparers from wearing any jewelry, except wedding bands. Mr. Banga was repeatedly cited for wearing a kara. The Sikh Coalition successfully argued that an arbitrary allowance for wedding bands but not a kara (a religious article of faith) violates constitutional guarantees of the free exercise of religion.

The Sikh Coalition, along with co-counsel, scored a major legal victory against AutoZone earlier this year. Frank MahoneyBurroughs, a Massachusetts man, who after adopting Sikhism, was not permitted to wear his turban and kara to work, repeatedly taunted as a “terrorist” and as “Bin Laden,” and fired for filing a complaint of religious harassment with human resources. A federal court found that Autozone had failed to accommodate his religious beliefs. A settlement agreement followed, providing, in part: (1) $75,000 in damages plus attorneys’ fees; and (2) a court order for AutoZone to implement stronger anti-discrimination policies and practices nationwide.

In a strong show of perseverance, the Sikh Coalition decisively won a seven-year federal legal battle against New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) this past May. At issue was whether the MTA could force Sikh workers to either brand their dastaars with a corporate logo or be forced to work out of public view.

Prominent in the Justice case was Kevin Harrington, a subway train operator and a Sikh who wears a turban. After the 9/11 attacks, he was commended by the [MTA] for helping his passengers to safety when the World Trade Center towers collapsed. But in 2004, he said, his superiors asked him to remove his turban, arguing that passengers might not recognize him as an employee during an emergency. Mr. Harrington recently dismissed this idea, noting that during the 9/11 emergency, nobody saw him as “anything other than a train operator.” It is long past time for the [MTA] to have figured that out.

If you believe that you have been discriminated against or subject to bias, and would like to request legal assistance from the Sikh Coalition, please visit our website at http://sikhcoalition.org/request-legal-assistance or call 212-655-3095 x 85.

“I would like to thank the Sikh Coalition for fighting for me, supporting me, and for winning! This victory will raise awareness among the Sikh community and will encourage other Sikhs to fight to practice their faith.”

-Navraj Singh Banga
Seasoned Sikh Presenter’s Course Graduates Continue to Educate About Sikhs

Launched in 2010, the Sikh Presenter’s Course is a one-of-a-kind training course designed, developed, and organized by the Sikh Coalition. From the pilot course held in New York City, the Sikh Coalition has led Sikh Presenter’s Course in the tri-state area, the California Bay Area and the Washington DC Metro Area. We now have over 50 graduates in the country, spanning six different states. These graduates have led presentations on Sikhs and Sikh practices in schools, gurdwaras, their own workplaces, media outlets, and interfaith gatherings.

Our graduates have led an estimated 150 presentations, reaching over 9,000 Americans since 2010. During these presentations, our audiences have learned about Sikh history, our basic beliefs, and the significance of the Sikh articles of faith as a means of promoting mutual respect and appreciation for diversity. We have found that the need for these presentations and the one-on-one dialogue that it inspires grows every year. For this reason, the Sikh Coalition continues to build relationships with sevadaars across the country, and always encourages more Sikhs to lead these presentations.

If you live in NY, NJ, the California Bay Area, or the Washington DC Metro Area and would like a presentation on Sikhs at your school/work, please contact us. We would be happy to arrange a Sikh Awareness presentation!

Introducing the Next Generation of Fearless Leaders

This summer, the Sikh Coalition launched the Junior Sikh Coalition, a year-long youth leadership development program that creates opportunities for Sikh youth to grow into fearless leaders. Using Sikh values of equality, social justice and sarbat da bhalla, the Junior Sikh Coalition program empowers Sikh youth to mobilize themselves and their communities around issues affecting youth.

Junior Sikh Coalition members meet each week to participate in leadership trainings that enable them to collectively develop real solutions in their communities. The program offers hands-on experience in youth organizing, advocacy, diversity education and civil rights law and empowers youth with skill-sets that are transferable to their community work, academics and careers.

The Junior Sikh Coalition worked tirelessly this summer to launch their first series of workshops on school bullying. The workshops were developed and facilitated by the youth team to inform Sikh youth on ways to identify bullying, respond to bullying, their legal rights at school and anti-bullying resources available to them.

The Junior Sikh Coalition empowered over 700 Sikh youth in New York and New Jersey to stand up to bullying this summer. They plan to continue building their campaign and will reach even more Sikh youth next year!

“The Coalition has had so many kids come and say “thank you” for presenting to their schools because they needed their friends to know about why they wear a patka or why they look different. They then learn about the Sikh Coalition and thank us immensely for the Sikh Presenter’s Course program.”

—Sikh Presenter’s Course Graduate, New York City

For more information about the Sikh Coalition’s work, please visit www.sikhcoalition.org or call 212-655-3095.
Community Engagement from Coast to Coast

In 2012, the Sikh Coalition hosted three large-scale community events in support of our work - the Houston Bowl-a-thon, the Bay Area 5K for the 5Ks and the New York City Bowl-a-thon. Each event provided an opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate the progress of Sikhism in America and commit ourselves to a brighter future for generations to come.

These events were hugely successful with over 1,000 participants and nearly $150,000 raised. We are truly grateful for the sangat’s efforts and commitment to further this work.

The Sikh Coalition would like to thank all of the volunteers who led the efforts to put these events together. It is because of dedicated sevadaars that we can continue this work to create a Sikh-friendly country for generations to come.

We would also like to thank our sponsors for their generous support and commitment. This year’s sponsors include:

"It is so inspiring to see the community come together to celebrate the Sikh identity and inspire our youth to realize Guruji’s vision for the Khalsa."

- Sapreet Kaur, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition
Please Donate Today!

What is freedom worth to you? This full-time, high-impact organization is working day and night to protect your right to practice Sikhi. Your support will ensure that the Sikh flag continues to fly high!

50 Broad Street, Suite 1537
New York, NY, 10004