House Committee on Foreign Affairs
US House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Via electronic service

December 3, 2020

Re: Punjabi Farmer Economic Hardship & Indian Government Crackdown on Expressions of Democracy

Dear Chair Engel and Ranking Member McCaul,

On behalf of the Sikh Coalition - the nation's largest Sikh civil rights organization - I am writing to you at a moment of great importance for Sikh Americans nationwide.

Since September, Punjabi farmers have been protesting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's passing of three agricultural reform laws that drastically change the systems in which farmers get paid, including bringing an end to the Minimum Support Price (MSP). For Sikh farmers in Punjab who have been suffering the unbearable financial costs and consequences of an Indian government that has ignored their most basic needs for decades, these reform laws have led to mass protests in recent months. Many Sikhs in the United States deeply care about this matter as they have family back in Punjab or are only a generation or two removed. Protests have already taken place here in the United States in major cities like New York City and San Francisco and more are planned in other cities, including the Bay Area and Washington, D.C.

Tens of thousands of Punjabi (led by many Sikhs) farmers are attempting to peacefully assemble and voice their grievances in Delhi and have been met by Indian security forces who have brutally cracked down on their expressions of democracy. These attempts to squash peaceful protests have included blockades, destroying roads, using water cannons and tear gas and other forms of violence that have resulted in several civilian fatalities. In addition, Indian media predictably continues to make a concerted effort to falsely frame the peaceful protestors as extremists who are out to cause chaos in the nation's capital.

However, the real chaos and suffering continues to be in Punjab, where the long-time desperate economic realities have been so dire that it has led to permanent psychological trauma and pain throughout the region. Punjabi farming communities have been decimated by farmer suicides to the point where international aid agencies have stepped in to intervene. According to a 2011 report from the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University, one Indian farmer commits suicide every 30 minutes. In 2019, a total of 10,281 farmers and farm laborers died by suicide across the country, according to statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau. COVID-19 has only made the situation worse.

As the protests continue, Sikh Americans stand in solidarity with their Punjabi brothers and sisters who continue to suffer at the hands of Indian violence and human rights abuse. Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia have already condemned the actions of the Indian government. We urge you and the lawmakers who make up the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to raise awareness through statements and the introduction of a resolution. The world is looking for American leadership and your voice would be critical to help end the anti-democratic violence and demand that the Indian government provide economic relief for Punjabi farmers.

We are here to provide basic resources and additional information as needed.

Sincerely,

Sim J. Singh
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