

April 17, 2021

Sikh Coalition Policy Requests in Response to Indianapolis Shooting

We appreciate the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Office of Public Engagement, and National Security Council taking the time to meet with us today to discuss the tragic acts of violence and its impact against the Sikh American community and others. We are grateful for the President's leadership and commitment to acknowledging and appreciating the full diversity of our great nation.

Based on the public reporting we are deeply saddened to hear that the shooter had a propensity for violence -- something his mother had previously warned law enforcement about. It was no accident that the shooter targeted this particular FedEx facility where he had worked and knew was overwhelmingly staffed by Sikhs. This was not a crime of convenience or a spur of the moment attack; it was one of methodical planning and selection which echoes the targeting of Asian American spa parlors in Atlanta exactly one month ago. The people that were shot and killed were not random targets. As such, we implore the Administration to ensure that this shooting is not simply dismissed by the media or law enforcement and acknowledge what it is -- a deliberate act intended to inflict the most harm against diverse Americans. Our communities deserve to be safe in their workplaces, in the streets, and where we pray, without hate and bias that continue to stalk our communities unabated.

It should not take acts of mass casualty like this to bring safety to our communities. Nearly nine years ago the Oak Creek Gurdwara shooting by a white supremacist is what ultimately convinced the FBI that our government needs to track anti-Sikh hate crimes. Since then, we continue to find that law enforcement agencies under-report hate crimes, and fail to properly investigate, document, and report hate crime incidents. Data has to drive policy, but without a federal mandate on hate crime reporting from tribal, local, state, and federal law enforcement we cannot ever be sure if the problem of white supremacist violence is being appropriately addressed. The most recent available FBI data shows that 2019 was the deadliest year for hate crimes and also showed a second year of declines in law enforcement reporting of biased incidents. Sadly, Sikhs were once again among the top five groups targeted on the basis of religion despite being a small community in the United States.

To make matters worse, often our communities must lobby for justice -- requesting and demanding that law enforcement investigate incidents as bias motivated. Even when we are successful in getting police to do their jobs, we then face additional hurdles of prosecutors not wanting to bring hate crime charges due to the additional motive element they must prove. We also know that law enforcement agencies in Indiana are doing little to protect our community. In 2018, Gurjeet Singh, an observant Sikh father and husband, was held at gunpoint by a white man who made racist remarks like "I hate turban people" --



local law enforcement never took action despite knowing who the perpetrator was and where to find him. Incidents like these have become far too common and diminish trust in law enforcement and our government to effectively disrupt acts of hate and bias. We must break this cycle of violence against our communities and inadequate action by law enforcement starting now.

To address these long standing challenges that impact the Sikh American and other vulnerable communities, we request that the Biden Administration institute the following policy actions:

1. **Appoint a Sikh American Liaison in the White House Office of Public Engagement to ensure a wide range of the community's voices are heard and acted upon.** Our community has largely felt ignored in the aftermath of 9/11 backlash hate attacks and discrimination, and continues to see the reverberations of hate, bullying, profiling and discrimination with far reaching consequences even to this day.
2. **Acknowledge and share public awareness about the Sikh American community through public visits.** It is of high importance that the President meet with the impacted families in Indiana and with the Sikh American community on the next anniversary of the Oak Creek shooting on August 5, 2021. The President should award Presidential Medals of Freedom to the victims of this attack to counteract victimhood frameworks and uplift the courage, strength, and resilience of survivors.
3. We recognize that hate has not yet been established as a motive here and that it may not be the singular motive; however we also know that the attacker's knowledge of this workplace and who he was targeting must be taken into account when the Administration acknowledges the impact of hate, bias and white supremacist activity affecting our communities.
 - a. **Reinitiate interagency hate crime meetings and create a federal task force** with the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education, and Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Department of Health and Human Services that had been hosted by the Obama White House Domestic Policy Council. These meetings promote cross-agency collaboration, and must also be expanded to a Federal Task Force that includes law enforcement, and community stakeholders to ensure that prevention and response initiatives are appropriately addressed.
 - b. **Improve hate crime reporting by passing the recently re-introduced Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act [H.R.2383 / S.1086] and ensuring that all law enforcement agencies are required to report hate crimes.** This should be part of a larger initiative that prioritizes data collection, a key component of civil rights enforcement and ensuring compliance with federal hate crime and nondiscrimination laws.
 - c. **Close the loophole that limits federal prosecution of mixed motive hate crimes by reintroducing and passing the Justice for Victims of Hate**



Crime Act. To effectively combat hate crimes, law enforcement and advocates need the tools to hold offenders accountable and ensure our justice system protects all Americans. This important change addresses a split in federal courts on the interpretation of the motive requirement in the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 that currently leaves many victims without justice.

- d. **Reintroduce and pass the Disarm Hate Act to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of dangerous individuals.** Shooters opening fire on houses of worship, community centers, and at other soft targets are becoming far too common. More than 10,000 hate crimes in the U.S. involved a firearm. Anyone who has been convicted of a misdemeanor hate crime should not be allowed to jeopardize the peace of communities.
4. **Ensure that all vulnerable houses of worship, including Sikh gurdwaras throughout the United States, are provided with specific assistance in obtaining federal funding such as the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP).** Our community is far too often left to navigate the complex grant system without technical assistance, language access, or adequate time to take advantage of critical funding to protect our communities from another act of domestic terror.

We thank you for your efforts to help protect the communities we serve and look forward to working with your office to move these important policy priorities forward.

