

NSO PRESS RELEASE

GLOBAL SIKH COUNCIL

London 8 August 2015

The Network of Sikh Organisations hosted a very successful conference of the Global Sikh Council from 31 July- 3August. It followed an earlier exploratory conference in Australia last year. Delegates included representatives from the USA, Canada, Malaysia, Thailand, Spain, France Switzerland and the UK. Delegates from Australia were unable to attend but were represented by S Jatinder Singh Uppal a well-known businessman and philanthropist who will in future represent Thailand. The delegate from Pakistan, unable to travel made a useful contribution through skype.

The background to the conference and the formation of the Global Sikh Council, was a shared concern that those in Amritsar who purport to lead the Sikh community are completely out of touch with ground realities in the wider world and are too enmeshed in the corrupt world of Indian politics. This has led to their issuing inconsistent pronouncement that ignore the very real issues facing the world Sikh community.

The conference ably organised and chaired by Lady Kanwaljit Kaur- Singh OBE with S.Karamjit Singh Thind (Co-Chair NSO) as Moderator, was considered a huge success by all. Details of the Constitution drafted in the Australian meeting were discussed and a draft is now being prepared for publication. The conference was characterised by a shared concern for the future of the Sikh panth shown in the high level of debate with many constructive contributions. S Gulbarg Singh (USA), a prime mover in the GSC initiative helped to keep delegates focussed on the main issues.

Key issues discussed included:

- **Easier availability of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS).** There was general concern that too many petty restrictions were being placed on its ready availability to gurdwaras and individuals. Misplaced concern over its purchase and transportation in the name of 'respect' were making the GGS an object of worship rather than the guidance that our Gurus intended. Many agreed with Lord Singh acting as advisor that the best respect we can show the GGS is to read it and live its guidance.
- **The Nanakshahi calendar.** There was common concern that authorities in Amritsar were pandering to Hindu extremists in their attempts to take us back to the old Hindu calendar with dates of gurpurbs being tied to the lunar calendar. It was decided that Nanakshahi Calendar with its fixed dates for Sikh festivals should be accepted and used globally. A major advantage is that it allows dates of key Sikh festivals to be incorporated in official diaries well in advance. NSO policy has always been to accept Nanakshahi Calendar. GSC agreed to promote this calendar, copies of calendar will be printed under the banner of GSC and made available worldwide. It was decided that Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birthday shall be fixed as per S. Purewal's advice.
- **World Heritage status for Harmandir Sahib.** While the granting of World Heritage status gave due recognition, concern was voiced over possible

unnecessary government involvement in the management of the Harmandir Sahib. While such status has been conferred on the Vatican, its near national recognition leaves the Vatican in control. The Harmandir Sahib does not have such autonomy or international recognition or sophisticated management. The consensus was that the proposal might turn the centre of the Sikh faith into a mere tourist attraction and should be resisted.

- **Involvement of Sikhs in India** It was agreed that Sikh organisations in India should be invited to join the GHSC sending 2-3 delegates
- **Sikh Heritage Sites in India** Concern was raised over amateurish Kar Seva work on important gurdwaras and other places of Sikh historical interest which unconsciously destroyed many priceless aspects of the original construction. The GSC agreed that such work should only be carried out under expert coordinated supervision.
- **S Gurdial Singh from France** stated that the Turban issue in France has still not been resolved. GSC and NSO promised full support

An open session was held on Sunday morning to which non-members were invited to contribute. S. Inder Singh Chawla Deputy Director Sikh Chapaincy Service and Gagandeep Singh the first full-time Sikh chaplain gave a useful reminder of the outreach work necessary by giving a brief presentation of the efforts of the Service to reduce re-offending.

Subject to further consultation with those not present, the following were provisionally elected to form an interim working Committee.

S. Gulbarg Singh	USA	President
Lady Kanwaljit Kaur Singh	UK	Vice President
S Harcharan Singh	Malaysia	Treasurer
Gurdeep Singh Kundan	Switzerland	Secretary
S Jatinder Singh	Thailand	Media and Public Relations.

It was suggested that Lord Indarjit Singh UK, S Jasbir Singh Mann USA, S Pritam Singh Aulakh Canada, and S Kirpal Singh Nijher USA become Advisors.

All delegates and NSO volunteers were taken by coach on a site seeing tour of places of interest in central London including a brief visit to the V&A museum to look at the throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh artefacts.

The NSO thanks Lady Kanwaljit Kaur Singh for organising the event and thanks to all NSO members for providing full support to make the Conference a success. . Thanks go to Srn Amar Subhag Kaur Maker, Srn Jasbir Kaur Vohra, S Gurmit Singh, S Nichhatar Singh Kandola and S Rajinder Singh Sandhu for providing financial and other support for the necessary arrangements.

NSO also wishes to acknowledge the kind hospitality of Guru Singh Sabha Hounslow for arranging excellent conference facilities, langar and an endless supply of refreshments.

Finally, S Karamjit Singh Thind (Co-chair NSO), S Surinderjit Singh, S Satnam Singh Poonia (Co- chair NSO), S Satvinder Singh and Srn Satinder Kaur Thind are to be congratulated for IT and photography role in recording the proceedings.

Next Meeting to be held in France in March 19 to 21 2016