

Sikhs outdo again at the Parliament of World's Religion 2018 in Toronto, Canada Nov 1 – 7, 2018



Mrs. Taranjeet Kaur with visitors at the ASC exhibit

The American Sikh Council (ASC) along-with with other Sikh organizations participated with gusto at the Parliament of World's Religions (PoWR) held The Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC), Toronto, Canada from November 1 – 7, 2018. This event is held every 3-4 years and this year it was attended by over 10,000 people of faith from over 50 different religious and peace organizations from more than 80 countries.

The highlight of the Parliament of World's Regions was the 'Guru Ka Langar' which was a combined effort of the Sikhs across the Canada. A special note of thanks goes to the Ontario Sikhs and Gurdwara Council (OSGC) who led this sewa, the organizers, the sewadars the local sangat and many unnamed individuals who took the initiative to lead and take this enormous responsibility along with World Sikh Organization (WSO), to hold the 'Guru Ka Langar'.

The OSGC did an excellent job of planning the large stand-alone displays which covered the entire gamut of the Sikh heritage – from the Sustained Sikh Genocide to the Khalsa Aid and much more! The World Sikh Organization (WSO Canada, provided additional support in moving this enormous project forward. The phenomenal sewa by all the volunteers from the gurdwaras of greater Toronto area was simply amazing.

The OSGC did an incredible job to coordinate and cook the 'Guru Ka Langar' at the Gurdwara Sahib and provide an outstanding sewa overall. The langar would open at 11:30 am – 2:30 am every day for seven days and was very well organized. Thanks to these and all other 'panthic' organizations for providing financial support for the 'Guru Ka Langar' to be a resounding success and making a lasting imprint in all the attendees from across the globe.

The American Sikh Council (ASC) was represented by Dr.Gurdas Singh, S.Jagjit Kaur, Dr. Surinder Singh, S.Narinder Kaur, S.Ajit Singh, S.Manjit Kaur, Dr.Manbir Singh, S.Taranjeet Kaur, S.Balmeet Singh, S.Jasbir Kaur, S.Kirpal Singh, S.Sutinder Singh, S.Savraj Singh and S.Shamsher Singh.

ASC member Dr.Manbir Singh observed, *"People were drawn to the ASC exhibit; some out of curiosity and many others who simply wanted to meet and talk. But everyone walked away with a smile of gaining new knowledge and understanding, while many got turbans tied to gain an insight of what it feels to be a practicing Sikh."*



American Sikh Council delegates with other visitors in turbans at the ASC exhibit

Sikhs held over 75 several seminars, panel discussions and presentations over the seven days covering an array of topics, from the 'Sikh Genocide' to global peace and everything in-between. The Sikh speakers spoke about their religion, their history and their traditions. There was also a lot of focus on the issues and problems Sikhs have had in the past, especially since 9/11. Other speakers focused on the current issues such as discrimination, hate crimes, bullying and harassment, in the US and in Panjab. The speakers emphasized the teachings of love, humility, universality of all and the oneness of the Almighty. Some of the key presenters were

Lady Dr.Kanwaljit Kaur of UK with the bulk of the speakers being from the US. The presentations were very well received.

One of the most underrepresented groups in previous PoWR's were the 'Dalits' who had a reasonably good showing this year. The Dalits not only participated and candidly spoke about living with the daily indignities of the insidious Brahmanical caste system but were also supported by all the Sikhs to stand up against the diasporic tyranny of the upper castes which continues today including being threatened by the upper caste right-wing Hindus at the PoWR.



Dr.Gurdas Singh, Dr.Kanwaljit Kaur and Mrs. Jagjit Kaur

The upper caste Hindus started to complain about the large presence of Sikhs on the very first day of the PoWR and actually had the audacity to put it in writing. It is fascinating and truly ironic how the upper caste Hindus (many citizens) of America and Canada get completely bent out of shape when Sikhs talk about the '*Sustained Sikh Genocide 1984-1998*', and further refuse to acknowledge the truth about the Indian government's long term diabolical role in the persecution. Any time Sikhs speak truth to power they are immediately vilified as secessionists, which simply goes to show the upper caste insecurities and paranoia. Upper caste Hindus have always held a patronizing attitude towards Sikhs and refuse to acknowledge the true independence of their faith and being regarded as equals. This year the Sikhs not only stole the show but made a powerful impact at the global stage while the caste Hindus felt a sense of permanent entitlement to being on center stage and were unnerved because they were upstaged. Free speech is the right of every human in North America, since it is a somewhat curtailed commodity in the homeland of the caste Hindus; they cannot stand the fact that the many skeletons in their caste brethren's closet are being publicly aired.



Sikh delegates from several organizations (US & Canada) at the PoWR

Other programs included kirtan by the Sikh Youth Alliance of North America (SYANA). Sikh youth organizations had a good display and presentations in the 'Sacred Space' room.

The American Sikh Council (ASC) had a stand-alone exhibit where they handed out various educational materials which included brochures on the *Sikh Faith*, *Sikh Scripture*, *History of Sikh Americans*, *Bullying of Sikh American Children*, *Sikh Genocide* and several books published by ASC on the Sikh heritage were displayed at the exhibit.

Over the week-long event ASC volunteers tied over 400 turbans. Other Sikh exhibits such as the World Sikh Organization (WSO) also ended up tying a few hundred turbans. While tying turbans ASC members had a one on one contact with guests and the undivided attention from a few minutes to longer discussions to explain their faith heritage and identity. After the 'Guru Ka Langar' the turban tying was the most popular and memorable part of the PoWR.



American Sikh Council representatives with other sewadars at the exhibit

One out of every 8-10 attendees had a dastaar/turban on their head. Many came back the next day to retie their turbans or request a different color. Some of the attendees even reported that they slept with their turbans in case they may be unable to put it back on next day. Some actually went to the airport on their way back with the turban on their head as they wanted experience the treatment that each Sikh gets when they travel by air.

As ASC President Dr.Gurdas Singh and Vice-President S.Jasbir Kaur witnessed, *"Many of the people we tied turbans on would either smile or get emotional as it opened their eyes to something unique and educational transforming their preconceived notions in a positive manner."*

The Sikh participation in this year's Parliament of World's Religions was a monumental success, all due to the collective effort of Sikhs across our nation, Canada and beyond.



Dr.Manbir Singh and Mrs.Taranjeet Kaur with a visitor at the exhibit

ASC member S.Kirpal Singh stated the most common comment by the attendees on the final day was, *"The Sikhs have completely stolen the show!"*



Mrs.Jasbir Kaur with visitors at the ASC exhibit

Dr.Kanwaljit Kaur the current President of the Global Sikh Council (GSC) spoke at the closing ceremony giving a very positive and uplifting message on behalf of the Sikhs.



American Sikh Council delegates busy tying turbans at the ASC exhibit

The next Parliament of World Religions has been scheduled in two years (not four) with the country to be announced soon.

<https://religionnews.com/2018/11/06/trumps-presidency-christian-supremacism-criticized-at-parliament-of-world-religions/>

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