



SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP (SHRG) UK

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Promoting pluralism and human rights around the world
irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion or political opinion.

World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 31 August – 7 September 2001.

SHRG Plenary Statement

Thank you Mr Chairperson

The Sikh Human Rights group applauds the hard work of many governments towards making the World Conference Against Racism a realistic way forward. Racism developed in its present form during colonialism when the European philosophers consolidate colonial adventures by categorising and creating a hierarchical classification of races, inflicting numerous miseries around the world.

Despite fifty years of decolonisation process, racism still manifests itself in many forms and its scars still affect many countries. Racism has imposed itself in a hegemony of concepts and engagement of language which is largely European in origin. Policies and Practices based on anti-racism and anti-discrimination remain an important part of the strategy to combat racism. However, they remain a reaction to and consequent counter product of colonialism assuming that humanity will be permanently locked in this battle, needing repeated programs to eradicate racism.

While we must recognise the ills of the past and put them right, we must look to a future where 'racism' is no longer a term in our deliberations or in common use, nor does it submit to the hegemony of one set of concepts and linguistic boundaries. The human race will need to accept and respect the rich diversity of human beings that nature has cultivated and strengthen. Policies and practices need to be out in place in order to promote an inclusive an equal human society based on the concept of its various civilisations. SHRG would like to see further exploration, development and promotion of the concept and the principle of diversity through research, dialogue and proposals for future action.

We also wish to bring to the attention of the WCAR the complex discriminatory practices faced by Sikhs. Sikhs are a community with a distinct identity that has always challenged pressures of conformity and defended the freedom of conscience. However, in many countries, Sikhs face discrimination in employment, education and in places of social interaction because of their practice of wearing a turban and maintaining unshorn hair as an expression of their respect of nature and their distinct identity. It is not always active prejudice that Sikhs face, but the invisibility within legislation and public policy regarding Sikhs that leads to discriminatory practices.

Existing national legislation and policies fall short of protecting the intertwined racial/cultural/ethnic/religious identity of the Sikhs. Very few other groups fall into this sort of category. Sikhs, a very visible community, become and continue to be invisible within the national legal systems of some countries. For this reason Sikhs have to resort to the highest of courts in the land to protect the right of expression of their distinct identity. However in many countries the possibility of exclusion remains. The category of religion does not adequately protect Sikhs. We call ourselves 'Qaum' that has no translation in English.

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We are grateful to the WCAR and countries that have introduced paragraph 73 in the Declaration in an attempt to include Sikhs. We hope that states will ensure that a global approach is taken towards the fight against racism and discrimination. It will be a shame if states, particularly in regionalised contexts, failed to draw on measures, policies, programmes which embody the best and most inclusive approach amongst those countries.

We ask the WCAR to built foundations of the future on principles of diversity understood around the world and to fully include the Sikhs in its deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.