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

World Conference Against Racism, Tehran Regional Meeting, 19-21 February 2001.

SHRG Statement

Thank you Madam/Mister Chairperson

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important forum. Race cannot be dissociated from culture. A great deal of racial discrimination involves cultural prejudices and or cultural hegemony. History has seen many examples where people have attempted to create unitary cultures. When communities have resisted assimilation, they have found themselves victimised, prejudiced against and marginalized.

Mr Chairperson history has shown that these attempts have failed to destroy the indomitable diversity of human beings time and again. Communities, which can be categorised as distinct races, have resisted assimilations into the culture of a new wave of a powerful race. Often the price paid has been immense with thousands and sometimes millions of casualties.

Regrettably little has changed. Despite the tenacity of racial and cultural diversity to survive the worse ravages of uniformity crusades in history, we continue to live in a world where such attempts are made relentlessly. Surely uniformity is the death of the creative spirit of human intellect.

These attempts to create a uniform society and dominant race seem to exist in all parts of the world. There are daily threats from western civilisations to negate or ridicule the cultures of other races as 'orthodox', unmodern, even primitive and fundamentalist.

We are faced with intolerances in some regions of the Middles East. We observe the dangerous and misplaced ideas of racial and cultural superiority that have led to the unfortunate wars in the Balkans. We are distressed to read of prejudices against minority races and cultures in North Eurasian regions. The Far East has is not any more different than the rest of the world as some parts of it revel in their technological advances as evidence of racial superiority.

We hear with sadness that some races within Africa continue to assert their dominance over others by assuming their own right to rule and access to resources.

Similarly we note the problems of race in the Americas, from North to South where the cultures of indigenous people are being decimated and the cultures of different races being pushed towards general conformity.

We see similar problems in South Asia where the drive towards assimilation and erosion of the distinct cultural characteristics of different races is being pursued relentlessly. The religiously distinct communities and races are being denied to celebrate, enjoy and advance their own distinctive cultures.

Mr Chairperson, the rhetoric of Unity in diversity remains just that, rhetoric used in politics but never believed in earnest or applied in reality.

We the Sikhs believe in all humanity to be seen as equal without prejudice. We believe that a pluralistic world full of diverse racial cultures is a gift that we should cherish. Different races have developed different cultural characteristics and philosophies, which both add to the mosaic of a rich, colourful and creative humanity as well as broaden the intellectual treasure of human beings.

We at the Sikh Human Rights Group hope that the world conference will acknowledge that colour and physical features are not the sole principles of racial distinctions but that we appreciate that different races have developed different cultures.

We further hope that the World Conference will resolve to denounce policies of assimilation of cultures into one and discourage the persistent attempts to create conformity and uniformity in some countries.

We suggest that the World conference resolve to promote pluralism as a cornerstone of a diverse and rich world where different races are encouraged to retain and develop their distinctive cultures without pressures or efforts to assimilate.

We consider that the World Conference has a unique opportunity to endorse the diversity of human race and enfranchise the cultures of different races in the spirit of a plural and constructive co-existence of all races.

We at the Sikh Human Rights Group request the World Conference to denounce the practice by certain majority and dominant groups to create disinformation, prejudices and destabilisation of culturally distinct races in an effort to assimilate them into a homogenous majority culture.

In the end let me say that we would like to bequeath to the world conference one of the most profound statements of Sikh philosophy, Manas ki Jat sub ek hi pehachaneo, Recognise all of humanity as equal. Let diversity flourish and equality dominate.

I thank you for your attention.