

Sikh Youth Group ‘Summon’ France to UN French Law Banning Turban in Schools Challenged; Sikhs Fight for ‘Dignity’

I.P. Singh

A Sikh advocacy group has challenged the French government’s ban on turbans before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. United Sikhs, which filed the challenge on December 15, told TOI that since France passed a law in 2004 banning the wearing of religious symbols, including the Sikh turban, to public schools, three cases had been moved before the UN.

“We’re asking the UN to deliver Sikhs in France their rights under Article 2, 17, 12, 18 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which are derived from the inherent dignity of the human beings,” said legal director of United Sikhs Mejindarpal Kaur. “Under the ICCPR, France may restrict these fundamental rights on only the most compelling grounds. We submit that France has not made out a compelling case for denying a Sikh the right to wear a turban,” she added.

United Sikhs’ staff attorney Jaspreet Singh said one of the applicants, Bikramjit Singh, was 18 years old when he was expelled from school in 2004 after France passed the law. The other two applicants are Shingara Mann Singh (52) and Ranjit Singh (70) who were denied renewals of ID documents because they refused to remove their turbans to get identity photographs clicked. While Shingara Mann Singh, who held a French passport for 15 years, was refused replacement passport by French authorities in 2005 as he refused to remove the turban for his pension photo ID, Ranjit Singh has been deprived of health care since 2002 for want of renewal of his residence card with a similar condition. Their cases were dismissed by French courts and then by European Court of Human Rights.

“In essence, France is insisting that the applicants expose themselves not only at the time the photograph is taken, but also each and every time they have to produce their ID. France’s insistence that the applicants choose between repeated violations of their religious beliefs, with the attendant shame and humiliation, and being unable to travel freely inside and outside France is unjustifiable, lawyers said on the ID cases.



[Courtesy: Times New Network]