

Sikhs Participate in Parliament of World's Religions

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MORE THAN 200 SIKHS from all over the world (including India, United States of America, Canada, Europe, and Australia) participated in the Parliament of the World's Religions held on December 3-9, 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. About 5,000 persons from more than 200 faiths from 80 countries across the world attended the event.

The theme of the parliament was **Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth**. It was organized by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR). Representatives of diverse world religions addressed the conference on the problems of the world like poverty, ignorance, crisis of ethics, and environmental concerns.

Representatives of World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR), Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria (SICV), Australian Sikhs, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC), Gurmat Sangeet Project, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Institute for Understanding Sikhism, International Fateh Academy, International Institute of Gurmat Studies, Nanakshahi Trust, Palatine Gurdwara Sahib Chicago, Sikh Council of Australia, Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation, Sikh Youth Federation, 3HO, and United Sikhs attended.

Sikhs were involved in interfaith, intrafaith, and engagement sessions as well as religious observances. The plenary sessions also included visible Sikh presence and participation.

- Interfaith understanding in Sikh history and theology (Balwant Singh Hansra - USA, Harnam Singh Shan - India, Sangat Singh Syalee - USA, Devinder Singh Chahal - Canada, Rajinder Singh Mago - USA)
- Principles and articles of the Sikh faith (Ranbir Singh Sandhu - USA, Kuldeep Singh - USA, Gurbax Singh Gulshan - UK, Mejinderpal Kaur - UK)
- Preservation of Sikh heritage (Balwant Singh Dhillon - India, Davinderpal Singh - India, Balvinder Singh - India, Sarbpreet Singh - USA)
- Sikh youth perspectives (Jasjit Singh – Australia, Jessie Kaur - USA, Gurpal Singh - Australia)
- Gender equality in Sikh faith (Amrit Kaur Vesha - Australia, Gurbux Kaur Kahlon - USA)
- Sikh diaspora and global Sikh community (Kuldeep Singh – USA, Gurbax Singh Gulshan – UK, Ranbir Singh Sandhu – USA, Ajmer Singh Gill – Australia)

Sikh participants also presented papers in several interfaith and engagement sessions, including:

- President Jimmy Carter, Nobel Laureate, panel on equality for women and girls
- Creative methodologies for interreligious dialogue
- Religion's imperative to present "the other" faithfully
- Talking about my generation

- Does the media have faith?
- Honoring the sacred feminine
- Search for inner peace
- The importance of family
- Interreligious dialogue making a world of difference to establish peace: Sikh perspective
- Ecological wisdom: Towards a sustainable and peaceful ecology
- Developing a dynamic interfaith movement for your city
- Sharing resources in an increasingly globalized world
- Democracy and diversity in global perspective
- Sacred sites
- Global ethics and religion forum
- Breaking barriers: Global women of faith
- Educating religious leaders for a multi-faith world
- Strangers in a strange land: Integration of religious minorities into Australia
- Experience the women's interfaith network
- Rivers of life: Community, water, and spirit in Australia
- Voices of peace: Models for productive coexistence among youth
- Faith, culture, and policing: The Victorian experience

A highlight of the parliament for the Sikh community was an International Sikh Consultation by WSC-AR convened as a formal parliament session on December 7. About 100 Sikhs from across the world gathered to discuss issues with regard to developing an international Sikh representative structure / organization that discourages individual personal leadership. The session was moderated by Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu, founding Secretary General of WSC-AR. The need for an international representative Sikh organization was unanimously agreed upon and consultations within countries with a significant Sikh Diaspora presence will be pursued with the objective of having an organizational structure in place by the time the next parliament is convened in 2014.

Some of the other highlights of the parliament were as follows:

- The Sikh community parliament attendees from across the world gathered at the Craigieburn Gurdwara Sahib on December 4 to pray together during the Communities Night celebrations. The event was hosted by Craigieburn Gurdwara Sahib and the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria.
- The WSC-AR sponsored a screening of the movie "Divided We Fall" with Director Valarie Kaur at the parliament on December 5.
- A highlight of the World Sacred Music Concert on December 6 was a Sabad (verse from Sikh scripture set to its original raag) sung by Bhai Kultar Singh Jatha (of Delhi, India) before thousands gathered at the evening event.
- Mr. Roop Singh, Additional Secretary of the SGPC travelled from Amritsar, India to Melbourne, Australia to address the closing ceremony (on December 9) on behalf of Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. He shared the message of Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, and said "On the auspicious occasion of the Parliament of the World's Religions that is being held in Melbourne, I have brought for

the entire humanity a message of mutual respect and universal brotherhood from Sri Harmandar Sahib, Sri Amritsar, the holy place of worship for all and the centre for the betterment of humanity.”

Sikh Missionary Centre USA and other organizations provided books, CDs and brochures on the Sikh faith, which were distributed during the parliament at the educational booth of the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria.

The World Sikh Council – America Region, with the financial support of many of its member Gurdwaras and organizations, helped several Sikh scholars from India, US, and Europe to travel to the parliament and present papers. The Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, with the financial support of many Gurdwaras of Melbourne, helped representatives from abroad to travel and participate in the event.

The WSC-AR in collaboration with SICV plans to publish a Sikh proceedings of the parliament in 2010. The publication will include peer reviewed papers presented by Sikhs at the parliament.

