

UN/NGO's adopt a Declaration of Peace

New York, September 13, 2004: The Sikh NGO at United Nations adopted a 2004 Declaration at Guiding Principles for Civil Society last September. These principles are mainly taken from the universal wisdom of Sri Guru Granth Sahib compiled 400 years ago.

The fifty-seventh annual Conference of NGOs and the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) concluded a three days conference at the UN Headquarters in New York. More than 1,800 representatives, from 540 organizations based in 93 countries, had come together for three days to assess the progress and consider the way forward to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

At this year's meeting, the Sikh representatives and their friends urged that a significant change in attitude would be necessary to unite the world communities to promote the peace and achieve the development goals.

On the First Day of the conference, September 8, the friends of the Sikhs met informally with Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of the United Nations, *Shashi Tharoor*, after the plenary session in the General Assembly.

On September 9, the Sikh delegates and their friends gathered for meditation in the UN meditation room. A prayer for the goodwill of all humanity followed. An informal meeting was also held to celebrate the compilation of Adi Guru Granth, stressing its interfaith character, universality and reverence for human rights, justice, peace and freedom of religious practice.

A 10-point Declaration was adopted and signed by Tatiana Androsov, Harbans Lal, Sat Kiran Kaur Khalsa (Sardarni Sahiba of Sikh Dharma International), Sat Mitar Kaur Khalsa (NGO/DPI/UN Representative of 3HO), and Dyal Singh Khalsa.

Declaration of the Guiding Principles for Civil Society.

1. To Recognize Presence of Divine Light in every living being.
2. To recognize that the earth is created according to God's cosmic blueprint and it is therefore intrinsically good. Nature is our mother, our home, our security, our peace, our past and our future. It is our obligation to treat natural things and habitats as our sacred temples and shrines, to be revered and preserved in all their intricate and fragile beauty.
3. God is the Creator and its creative manifestation extends to all humans. Therefore, all humans are intrinsically creative in partnership with God.
4. It is a human destiny to emulate the divine attributes; such as Identity with Truth, Fearlessness, Without Animosity, Eternal Personality, beyond the genetic and mimetic imprisonments, and Free Spirit that lives in Gratitude.
5. To experience Divinity in work and service, in art and science, in philosophy and religion, and in environment and creation.
6. To follow the principles of righteous living by believing in: Human Equality, Human Dignity, Justice, and Human Behaviors that cleanse the Body and the Mind.

7. To build the institutions of altruism and sharing in social infrastructures. Examples are: *Langar* or free community kitchen attached to every congregation, and Institutions like Pingalwara for disadvantaged citizens.
8. To be Advocates for most vulnerable in society.
9. To exert Spiritual and moral responsibility to Guide politics and political institutions, and to provide guidelines for leadership of religious institutions.
10. To build a World Order without the culture of “*mera Tera*” (meaning “mine and yours”) psychology. It is a transgression of the divine principle of unity in God’s creation to profile and divide people in “us “ and “them”.

[Courtesy: *Dr. Harbans Lal*]

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Bangkok’s Sikh firm stitches Bush suit

Jesse and Victor Singh Gulati, second generation Sikhs in Thailand, insist word-of-mouth is all the advertising they need for their hole-in-the-wall tailor shop. And who’s arguing when you have US president Goerge Bush hearing endorsements from a regular customer - his dad.

A stop at Rajawongse Clothier has over the years become a must for visiting statesmen, ambassadors and generals, along with some of the world’s top spies and secret service agents (“They like their suits a bit loose,” Victor notes).

The shop’s back wall is covered with letters of appreciation and photographs of happy customers like the Bushes, presidential hopeful Senator John Kerry, US homeland security secretary Tom Ridge and Nancy Reagan, whose aide thanked the Gulatis for coming to the former First Lady’s assistance at the last minute.

Rajawongse is among hundreds of Bangkok tailor shops, many catering to foreign visitors who have discovered that the city has dethroned such Asian tailoring capitals as Hong Kong in value for money.

Most of the tailors are geared to what Jesse, the 54-year-old family patriarch, somewhat condescendingly calls “the tourist trade”. Prices may be bargain-basement, but button tend to pop and collars wilt after a few wearings.

Then there are a handful of world-class masters like the Gulatis, who have built up a loyal clientele over 43 years through quality craftsmanship, reasonable price tags and a friendly, smooth-as-silk service in perfect English.

Jesse, his neat attire and trim beard topped by a turban, says his suits average \$250 and he hasn’t changed his prices in eight years. Comparable ones in Hong Kong go for \$700-800 while in New York custom tailors would charge up to \$2000, he says. Low overheads, the Gulatis say, keep prices down. Rajawongse does “zero advertising” although its profile is heightened by sponsorship of local charities, and a recent website has brought in substantial business.

The shop is hardly attractive enough to snare walk-ins along Bangkok’s Sukhumvit Road. Set in a row of nondescript shophouses, it consists of one narrow room stacked with bolts of cloth. The family set up there in 1974, having started their business 13 years earlier near a US Air Force base in the northeastern city of Ubon.

This was the Vietnam war area, which spawned a generation of entrepreneurs catering to American troops in the tourism, sex and tailoring trades. Among them was Jesse's now deceased father, a Sikh who had immigrated to Thailand from India and whose four sons and daughter followed him into the business. One of the sons, Raja, later set up Raja's Tailor, located around the corner from Rajawongse, and likewise has assembled an impressive global clientele.

It was an ambassador who recommended Rajawongse to the senior Bush, who brought measurements to have suits cut for all his sons while on a 1999 Bangkok visit. President Bush made contact during last October's summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, ordering two suits, gray and blue, plus five shirts.

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Fracas in Nankana Sahib

The Nankana Sahib Gurdwara near Lahore, one of the holiest of Sikh shrines, was attacked and a college on its compound was ransacked by a mob on Sept. 26. Nankana Sahib is the birthplace of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak.

"The mob first attacked college and then stormed the Gurdwara and threw stones at it," said a Pakistani newspaper, *Daily Times*, on Sept. 27. The mob was agitated over a reported recommendation to shift the Government Guru Nanak Degree College out of the gurdwara's premises to make room for Sikh pilgrims.

Neither the gurdwara nor the college authorities have approached the police to register a complaint. But the attack has drawn protests from the Sikh community here. Demonstrations were held in front of the Lahore Press club. "Things are under control. We are satisfied. Miscreants want to frustrate the Pakistan-India talks. The defilement was the first of its kind in the history of Pakistan," Kalyan Singh of the Sikh Sangat of Pakistan said.

The chief minister of Punjab (Pakistan), Pervaiz Elahi, said the guilty would be punished.

Tarlochan Singh, chairman of the National Minorities Commission, said the attack would damage Indo-Pak relations when the two countries were trying to come closer. "The act will instill fear into the Sikh community and it has hurt the sentiments of millions of Sikhs," he said.

The incident is bound to put some pressure on the UPA government to take the matter up officially with Islamabad.

The government of Pakistan has condemned the attack on the Nankana Sahib gurdwara, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, and assured the global Sikh community that it was determined to protect Sikh shrines in Pakistan and would deal with the "miscreants" firmly. A mob attacked the college premises protesting a proposal to shift the college to accommodate Sikh pilgrims.

British Queen visits Gurdwara

Amit Roy reports from London: The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh showed their support for Britain's Sikh community by paying a respectful and dignified visit to a gurdwara in Hounslow, west London, on Oct. 15, 2004.

In Britain, unlike America, there is little danger of Sikhs being mistaken for bearded followers of Osama bin Laden but the Queen clearly thinks there is no harm in the royal family playing its part in helping to keep race relations harmonious in troubled times.

In any case, the royal family always has had good relations with the Sikh community, partly because of the long military connection. Another reason is that the Sikhs are a vibrant part of the immigrant population, if the second and third generations can be included in this category.

Even the children of those who came as factory workers have now been to university and made a great success of their lives in Britain.

In 1997, to mark the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence, the Queen and Prince Philip visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar where she wore British Airways socks to allow her to step onto the burning marble.

Yesterday, on a cold, wet autumn day, she wore white ankle socks and covered her head with a golden shawl, while her husband, who followed respectfully a few paces behind, put on a blue headscarf bearing the symbol of the Khanda. The Prince practised his namaste pretty well. As the 500-strong congregation looked on, the Queen bowed her head.

The Queen opened a 2.5 million phase of development in the gurdwara, said to be the biggest outside India.

Telegraph

[Courtesy: *The*