

The UK Sikh Women's Conference

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Despite inclement weather, over 300 women braved the journey to attend the third Sikh Women's Conference on Sunday, 13th May 2007 at the Docklands Campus of University of East London, which focussed on key issues around 'family values' and working towards developing a strong community.

Following customary prayers, Councillor Balvinder Kaur Saund, Chairperson welcomed everyone, and Jasbir Kaur Panesar of University of East London hosted the event. Borough Commander Steve Allen of City of Westminster, attended the Conference on behalf of Metropolitan Police Sikh Association. He spoke on issues of 'honour related' crimes.

Ash Bains, a community empowerment specialist set the tone for the Conference, while Harjinder Singh Khalsa of '*Sikh Times*' spoke about domestic violence cases he had come across in West London. Generally it was agreed that despite the perceived sense that such cases were on the decline, the statistics proved that they were very much on the rise, with many cases culminating in fragmentation of families.

'Sathi Ludhianvi', presenter at 'Kismet Radio' spoke on the subject of female infanticides, and Lucky Dhillon, presenter of '*Amrit Vela*' programme at Spectrum Radio, pointed out that the killing of girl babies was practiced in the historical past, deplored by our Gurus, the difference was just that now, with new scanning technology, the girl babies were killed in the womb. Councillor Jagir Kaur Sekhon, OBE (Greenwich Council) Sudarshan Bhui, MBE (Aanchal Organisation) and Sangeeta Bhui, Youth Crime Officer spoke about gender discrimination and divisions within the community which retarded its progress in social community cohesion.

Amarjeet Kaur Grewal (daughter of Sardar Gurbachan Singh Sidhu, who is the author of an impressive book entitled '*Sikh Religion & Women*') presented copies of this book to the Executive Committee members of the Sikh Women's Alliance. Ajinder Pal Singh Chawla showed '*Roko Cancer*' Educational Film, impressing the need to have early tests for cancer. The Conference was also impressed with the BBC Breeze Project Exhibition, by Chaz Singh who demonstrated his pride in being a British Sikh.

Rajinder Kaur Johal and Perminder Kondral facilitated the workshop headed '**How to instill sound family values?**'

Jasbir Kaur Panesar and Jasbir Kaur Sumal facilitated the workshop on '**How to empower yourself through education?**'

Ash Bains and Councillor Sekhon facilitated the workshop on '**How to overcome gender inequalities within the family?**'

Harmander Singh and Kamal Kaur Palray facilitated the workshop on '**How to maximise every child's potential?**'

The findings of these four Workshops will be put together in a comprehensive report which will be presented at a future event and circulated widely.

Lunch was provided by Sikh Community Care Project and Dhol Academy entertained the audience with their dhol playing, and Sardar Fauja Singh, the 94 years old Marathon runner, started the *bhangra* dancing, in which everyone joined in, especially the ladies from the Ekta Elderly Group.

The following awards were presented to achievers and supporters of the Sikh Women's Alliance:

Sardar Baldev Singh Sabar (of Sikh Study Forum) for initiating the SWA.

Sardar Jagdev Singh Purewal, the inspiration and original founder of SWA.

Sardar Harmander Singh (of Sikhs in England) for policy advice to SWA

Sardar Upkar Singh Virdee (of Ford Motor Company) for voluntarily chaperoning women to community events in the Ford Community Bus.

Sardar Surinder Singh Saund for his support and encouragement to the SWA

Sudharshan Bhui, MBE for her work supporting women suffering domestic violence.

Bibi Balwant Kaur Ji for her lifetime work in the service of worldwide humanity.

Following thanks to the volunteers of the Sikh Women's Alliance and to all who attended, the conference concluded with the singing of the Sikh National Anthem.

