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# Sikhs at Parliament of World Religions

## WSN Network

**M**ore 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 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.

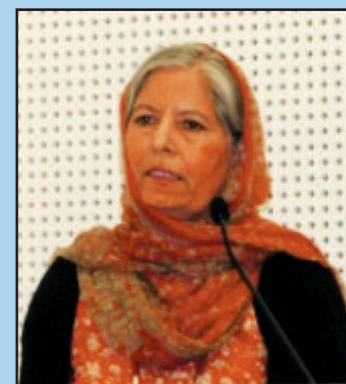
Sikhs were involved in interfaith, intrafaith, and engagement sessions as well as religious observances. The plenary sessions also included visible Sikh presence and participation.

Sikh speakers also presented papers in several interfaith and engagement sessions, including equality for women and girls, creative methodologies for inter-religious dialogue, religion's imperative to present "the other" faithfully, talking about new generation, media and faith, inner peace, importance of family, interreligious dialogue and Sikh perspective, sustainable and peaceful ecology, democracy and diversity in global perspective, women's interfaith network, models for productive coexistence among youth and 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



Sikhs attending the parliament (L to R: Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia, Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon, Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu, Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, Tejdeep Kaur, Dr. Davinderpal Singh, Kuldeep Singh)



Gurbax Kaur Kahlon (WSC-AR) addresses President Jimmy Carter panel on equality for women and girls



Valarie Kaur, Director of Divided We Fall screened the film at the parliament



Roop Singh of the SGPC addresses the Closing Plenary



Tejdeep Kaur and Kuldeep Singh of Sikh Youth Federation were panelists on "Talking About My Generation" session

## SIKH INTRAFaITH SESSIONS WERE HELD ON THE FOLLOWING TOPICS

- 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, Mejjinderpal 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, Gurbax Kaur Kahlon - USA)
- Sikh diaspora and global Sikh community (Kuldeep Singh - USA, Gurbax Singh Gulshan - UK, Ranbir Singh Sandhu - USA, Ajmer Singh Gill - Australia)

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.

Earlier, 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.

A highlight of the World Sacred Music Concert on December 6 was a Shabad sung by Bhai

Kultar Singh Jatha of Delhi, India before thousands gathered at the evening event.

Roop Singh, Additional Secretary of the SGPC travelled from Amritsar to Melbourne to address the closing ceremony on December 9 on behalf of Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib. He shared the message of Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar of Sri 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 mem-

ber 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 several Sikh representatives from abroad travel to and participate in the parliament.

The Sikh participation and engagement at the parliament was facilitated by the World Sikh Council - America Region (WSC-AR) and the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria (SICV), Australia. Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia, Chairperson of WSC-AR's Interfaith Committee, serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of CPWR on behalf of WSC-AR. Mr. Gurdarshan Singh Gill, of SICV, headed the local Sikh planning committee in Melbourne.

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.