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Session 5

Submission of Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar)

At the Conference on Anti-Semitism and other forms of Intolerance
At Cardoba, Spain, 8-9 June 2005

organised by
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Submitted by
Prof. Jagmohan Singh
General Secretary & Spokesperson

It is an honour and a privilege to participate in the OSCE conference on Anti-Semitism and other forms of Intolerance. I am here, alongwith my colleague, Bhai Chainn Singh, from France, on behalf of my party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), which has been waging a consistent battle for survival of the Sikh nation in homeland, Panjab.

Sikhs are an international nationality, whose ethnic roots are in Panjab. Apart from Panjab, Sikhs have made various parts of the globe, their second home. There is a substantial concentration of Sikhs in various parts of Europe. I speak for them and their problems.

Leaving one's home and hearth to escape genocide or for economic reasons is always a painful experience for anyone. It has been so for the Sikhs as well. In the early part of the last century, Sikhs left Panjab for economic reasons as India was following the socialist model of governance and development and Panjab received step-motherly treatment at the hands of the state.

In the later part of the last century, Sikhs were subjected to harassment, torture and genocide by the Indian state. A large number of Sikh youth had to flee Panjab to save their lives. A sizeable number of these reached various parts of Europe and were given asylum. By dint of their diligence and hard work they

have established them well in the societies they choose to live in. All Sikhs, maintaining their identity, have assimilated with the cultures of their chosen countries. They participate in the social, cultural and political lives of these countries. Thousands of Sikhs, who fought as part of the Commonwealth Armies, lie buried in the cemeteries of Europe.

Growing religious intolerance in Europe

In France and other parts of Europe, we see a disturbing trend of the growth of neo-fascism and neo-Nazism. The French general, Marshall Patien set up the Vichy regime and collaborated with the Nazis in deporting Jews, Socialists, Communists and gypsies to concentration camps.

Today, Sikhs in Europe are reeling under a difficult social situation. France has taken the lead in suppressing their religious rights. Since December 2003, France has jolted the Sikhs by enacting a law curbing their right to wear the turban. Attempts are being made in Germany and Belgium to curb this religious right of the Sikh people. There have been three major incidents of government officers denying the right to wear the turban in Germany. Denmark, a Scandinavian country, upholder of civil rights, has denied a Sikh student the right to wear his Kirpan.

We strongly believe that France, which is widely believed to be the home of liberty, equality and fraternity, is also the centre of racism since the Second World War. The ban on the Sikh turban and the humiliation to Sikhs while photographing them for identity purposes after removing their turban is the highpoint of its racist policy. Besides, this, it is an extremely humiliating experience for us and irks us for an endless period.

We fear very strongly that if this evil is not nipped in the bud, it will spread all over Europe. We also very strongly feel that the meaning of Secularism as adopted by the French is incorrect. Secularism does not mean an irreligious system. It means that the state will not interfere in the religious belief of its citizens. The American currency note, bears, "In God we Trust". Will the French refuse to accept the dollar bill? The Queen of England, as the British head of State, has to be a Christian, as per the English Constitution. This does not mean that the other religions are not acceptable and the Americans and the British are not secular.

French Apartheid against the Sikhs and other Ethnic Minorities

The Turban is our crowning glory. The turban is a part of our religious profession. The turban is not an ostentatious sign. To imagine a Sikh without the turban is to visualize him naked. Besides, it is the cultural emblem of a Sikh. He feels undressed without wearing it, just like any person from the Western society would feel without his clothes. For example, if I were to

appear in this conference without a turban, I would feel that I am being disrespectful to this distinguished assembly. The turban case has been fought in the British Parliament, in Canadian and American courts, from school to service matters. Sikhs have won their right everywhere. The ban on the turban is an infringement of our individual rights as a global citizen, as enshrined in the UN Bill of Rights as well as a clear violation of various UN treaties and conventions. It is a clear case of apartheid.

Appeal

The distinguished gathering of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe should take immediate stock of the situation as pertains to the Sikhs, the Sikh religion and the Sikh culture.

This conference must urge France must respect the Sikh right to wear the turban and Sikh children must not be denied the right to education, by forcing them not to wear the turban.

Denmark must allow Sikhs to wear the Kirpan.

The Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) believes that a Minorities Commission must be set up as a branch of the OSCE to monitor the protection of rights of ethnic minorities in OSCE states.

OSCE states must set up procedural mechanisms, like the UN mechanisms, to redress complaints on a more regular basis. Perhaps an Ombudsman authority may be set up review the implementation of UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Rights against Racism in various European countries.

OSCE states must study the global impact of their policies and at the same time review global policies as affect their residents who hail from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

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