

31st March 2020

**Sikh Assembly Statement of Serious Concern
and Support for the Sikh Community in Afghanistan**

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh

Sikh Assembly condemns in the strongest possible terms, the recent heinous and cowardly attack executed against the Sikh community in prayer at the Guru Har Rai Gurdwara, in the Shor Bazaar of Kabul, Afghanistan on 25th March 2020.

There is no greater crime than the taking of innocent life. This has completely traumatised such a small minority in the country, faced with the cold-blooded murder of the 25 Sikhs, including 7 women, a 13-year-old boy, a 4-year-old little girl, and a further 11 people left critically injured during this diabolical attack.

The onslaught continued with a despicable and immoral attack on the funeral services, by causing explosions amid the Sikh mourners in attendance and detonating further explosive devices targeting the Sikh Gurdwara. The assailants have since made a statement threatening the Afghan Sikh community to leave Afghanistan within 10 days, or face annihilation.

Media sources have identified the gunman as Indian national Abu Khalid al-Hindi and attributed the terrorist attack to the reviled Daesh group.

Sikh Assembly has reached out to the beleaguered community in Afghanistan through our member organisation, the humanitarian charity, Sikh Relief. They will assess the current situation and engage in the problematic and sensitive dialogue regarding the future security of the Afghan Sikhs, their ability to survive in such a hostile environment long term and the potential of resettling the community en masse in another country. Sikh Assembly encourages and applauds any nation that can provide urgent action to help these Sikhs, based on their conscience and humanitarian obligations as per international convention.

Sikh Assembly calls for immediate international intervention, as this attack was not unprecedented. In July 2018 Afghan Sikhs were similarly targeted by a suspected Islamic State suicide bomber, killing 19 people as they prepared to meet the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Jalalabad.

Sikh Assembly welcomes the UN condemnation of the attack as a positive first step and urges the Security Council to hold the Afghanistan Government responsible for conducting a full and proper investigation, while ensuring the remaining Sikh community is kept safe from further harm.

Just a few decades ago there were up to 300,000 Sikhs in Afghanistan, now there are approximately 350 Sikh families remaining, concentrated in the urban centres of Jalalabad, Ghazi and Kabul. Sikh Assembly will support any decision made by the Sikh community in Afghanistan and offer assistance wherever possible, through our member organisations and our esteemed colleagues and Management Board of the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, London, England.

There remains an absence of tangible and meaningful assurances of safety to the community and the centuries-old historically significant Gurdwaras in Afghanistan. Sikh Assembly encourages the international community to facilitate the resettling of the Afghan Sikhs at the earliest opportunity and accept their right to seek asylum on humanitarian grounds.

As proposed by the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, London, we encourage the Canadian Government to accept the remaining few hundred Afghan families as valid asylum seekers, facing religious persecution and potential genocide. We urge the Canadian Government to create a program based on their previous initiative named the Helmand Process, whereby Canada facilitated the resettlement of 25 families after the attack of 2018.

Jagtar Singh Gill, Trustee of Sikh Assembly, highlighted the ongoing and current threat to the Afghan Sikhs,

“Taking into consideration the current COVID-19 pandemic, we still expect a response by the international community to the massacre of 25 innocent Sikh men, women and children during prayers, in their house of worship. This case is of exceptional significance. The victims are now living under a new threat of having to leave the country within 10 days, or face annihilation by the perpetrators. This is unacceptable. We need urgent international assistance to secure their passage to safety and resettlement by countries that share the Sikh values of humanity, equality and egalitarianism.”

Balbir Singh Bains, Chairman of Sikh Relief, reiterated,

“Sikh Assembly and Sikh Relief condemns outright the attack on the Sikh Gurdwara of Shor Bazaar, Kabul in the strongest words available to civilised human beings and expects the victims to be assisted by Governments across the world, to welcome them on humanitarian grounds. We understand that the victims and other members of the Sikh community would prefer resettlement and urge all Governments to facilitate such. We pledge to support the community in whatever decision they make.”

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