

WORKING TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC FUTURE

NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP
NGO WITH SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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WELCOME TO OUR APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

DIRECTORS NOTE

BY DR JASDEV SINGH RAI (SHRG DIRECTOR) (LONDON OFFICE)

After the busy month of March at the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Sikh Human Rights Group has concentrated on its public projects. The two work synchronously. What we learn from the field, we try and take to the United Nations and vice versa.

The United Nations is not all about speeches. Statements are made at the United Nations Human Rights Council and other forums. However, a lot of background work happens. For instance, a number of documents are presented to the specialist bodies, Special Rapporteurs and diplomats. The purpose of all this is to sway opinion and bring about positive results.

April saw us holding a major event on climate change as part of our COP26 Youth Engagement Initiative. The SHRG began this initiative by taking secondary school students and undergraduate students to COP26 in Glasgow. They are all now committed to reversing the deterioration in climate, environment and biodiversity taking place in all of our lives. Consequently, we plan to hold many similar events over the course of 2022 and beyond.

Our climate change education and engagement event at University College London was attended by many students and members of civil society. The speakers have been working in the field of climate change mitigation for a considerable time and have consequently gained a lot of experience. The event was recorded and shown by the Sikh Channel (Sky channel 786). The students who attended felt that they learnt a lot and that their commitment to helping our UK and global societies overcome the many challenges, issues and threats posed by climate change was increasing. There is an excellent article contained in this newsletter (page 11) written by one of the students who also undertook a week-long work experience placement with our Human Rights Officer and Project Coordinator Mr Carlos Arbuthnott.

Our Sikh Neurodiversity Network Project has become a strong movement to further integrate children, young adults and adults with Autism within Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions as well as to offer support to their parents, relatives and careers. The project is holding regular events at Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall and at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick. Carlos, who is leading the project, has put his soul into it much to the delight of our participants. The project is expanding and has started to engage with other Gurdwaras across England and Wales. The project will promote lessons learnt to other communities and to the United Nations.

Similarly, our movement to abolish taxes for products that help to manage menstruation is gaining increasing support. For instance, the SHRG is currently working alongside some 50 other organisations with the same objective. It has taken up the issue with some State missions in Geneva. We are also hoping to organise a side event at the United Nations Human Rights Council in order to persuade more countries to abolish taxes on menstrual hygiene products or at least reduce them drastically. Ms Bethan Walters our Human Rights, Communications and Media Officer is leading this project and is collaborating with many other NGOs. Through this work, it is hoped that many more countries will understand that taxing tampons and other similar products is a form of gender discrimination. These products are not a luxury but a necessity. Women do not have a choice when it comes to menstruation. Therefore, taxing something that is a necessity because it concerns women, is gender discrimination.

We have had two excellent contributions to this newsletter from our interns, both of whom are students. The United States Supreme Court's intention to reverse **Roe v Wade** is a disturbing trend back towards the age-old game of a male-dominated world trying to control women's reproductivity against their choice or free will. The issue not only affects the USA but has caused concerns around the world. The world is asking whether the United States is a leader in human rights anymore.

The Lions Den series run by actress turned human rights activist, Ms Monica Gill has attracted considerable audience and support. It is part of the work being undertaken by the SHRG on food sovereignty, tackling hunger and poverty as well as supporting the survival of small farms. Langar, the free food provided within Gurdwaras and by Sikhs in public places as well as in disaster situations, is a driver for the SHRGs position on food sovereignty. It is extremely important that no one should go to bed hungry and that no one should depend on unhealthy food. Equally as important is that food and hunger should not be left to the mercy of capitalist profits.

Enjoy the newsletter! We hope to bring you more exciting news next month. Currently, the organisation is preparing for the United Nations Human Rights Council's 50th Regular Session in June.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jasdev Singh Rai

WELCOME TO OUR APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

EDITORS NOTE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

(HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AND PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE SHRG)

Welcome to the April 2022 edition of the Sikh Human Rights Group's monthly newsletter informing you of our ongoing work. Unfortunately, we are not able to cover everything that we do in this brief newsletter. Nevertheless, and as you will see we are engaged in a wide variety of international human rights issues to promote our founding doctrine of Pluralism.

We have also taken on a number of interns and volunteers who take up research, take notes during United Nations conferences and events and write reports. Consequently, we always try to encourage them to contribute to our newsletter.

If you would like to get involved in any of our ongoing projects or for anything else then please contact us via email at carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo

I very much hope that you enjoy the contents of this month's edition.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott



(Mr Carlos Arbuthnott)



**SIKH
NEURODIVERSITY
NETWORK**

GURDWARA SRI GURU SINGH SABHA SOUTHALL SEN ENGAGEMENT EVENT

This event is an opportunity for those with lifelong neurodiversity characteristics (SEN) of any age and those who care for them to come together to discuss how **Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall** can best support them and their families.

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network is currently establishing a network of children and adults with lifelong neurological characteristics, such as Autism, and listening to their experiences and the experiences of those who care for them. Specifically, regarding the problems they may have encountered whilst accessing Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions.

After we have completed this step we will then establish a network of experts within Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions who will be charged with increasing Sangat understanding, engagement and support for those with lifelong neurological characteristics.

There will be:

- Food and drink
- Music
- Arts and crafts
- Toys

Date: 12 June 2022 (Sunday)

Time: 13:00 - 15:30 (BST)

Address: Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (Upstairs Hall), 2-8 Park Avenue, Southall, UB1 3AG



To book your FREE ticket or for more information about this event and the Sikh Neurodiversity Network please [click here](#) or scan the QR code below.

N.B. Wheelchair access is available



COP26 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

UCL CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT EVENT

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



To watch the full event recordings please [click here](#) for part 1 and [click here](#) for part 2

Topic:

This was an opportunity for secondary school students, university students, young people and members of civil society to learn more about how they can help our UK and global societies mitigate and adapt to the negative and imminent impacts of climate change.

Panellists:

- **Mr Zack Polanski:** Green Party Politician
- **Ms Serena Bashal:** UK Youth Climate Coalition
- **Dr Virginie Le Masson:** Co-director of UCL's Centre for Gender and Disaster, Global M&E Coordinator for the GRRIPP project and Research Associate with UCL's Overseas Development Institute
- **Ms Lisa Hill:** Extinction Rebellion Activist (XR Talks and Training Division)

Chairs:

- **Mr Carlos Arbuthnott:** Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the SHRG (Primary Chair)
- **Ms Bethan Walters:** Human Rights, Communications & Media Officer at the SHRG (Secondary Chair)

Agenda:

- Introduction to panellists
- Presentation on climate change
- Questions posed to panellists
- Audience Q&A
- Presentation on UCL's brand new Global Humanitarian Studies BSc

COP26 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

UCL CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT EVENT

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

Questions included but were not limited to:

- Panellists: In your expert opinions how important are young people in our national effort to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change and what can secondary school and university students specifically do to help us as a society overcome the many challenges and imminent threats of climate change?
- Panellists: For those wishing to undertake their own environmental conservation projects in London and the surrounding areas what projects would you say the surrounding area is in most need of and what advice would you give them?
- Panellists: For those wishing to establish their own school, university or community environmental conservation projects what support is available to them in the local area? For instance, are there any pre-existing environmental conservation organisations or climate action groups that you have ties to and that would be able to assist our audience?

To find out more about the Green Party of England and Wales, the UK Youth Climate Coalition, Extinction Rebellion, SHRGs COP26 Youth Engagement Initiative or University College London then please visit the following websites:

- [Green Party of England and Wales](#)
- [UK Youth Climate Coalition](#)
- [Extinction Rebellion](#)
- [SHRGs COP26 Youth Engagement Initiative](#)
- [University College London](#)



SHOULD THE UNITED NATIONS ADOPT A NEW DEFINITION OF MENSTRUAL HEALTH?

BY MS BETHAN WALTERS (HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

If you Google the definition of menstruation, you often only get a biological answer and not an answer that gives you a true insight into what changes a person who menstruates goes through and how they will physically and mentally feel throughout their cycle (approx. 28 days give or take a couple of days).

Dr Julie Hennegan et al. published an article in 2021 entitled '**Menstrual Health: a Definition for Policy, Practice, and Research**' and submitted it to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to determine whether or not they will enhance the definition of menstrual health. Her definition is as follows:

'Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.'

Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls, and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle, throughout their life course, are able to:

- Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation, and changes experienced throughout the life course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.
- Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy, and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials, and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.
- Access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomforts and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief, and strategies for self-care.
- Experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.
- Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social, and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstrual-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion, and/or violence'.

To read the full article please [click here](#)



SHOULD THE UNITED NATIONS ADOPT A NEW DEFINITION OF MENSTRUAL HEALTH?

BY MS BETHAN WALTERS (HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

Dr Julie Hennegan is a mixed-methods researcher specialising in global adolescent and women's health. She explores the social and environmental determinants of health and the design and evaluation of complex social interventions.

In particular, Julie's work focuses on menstrual health, and sexual and reproductive health including rights, and gender dimensions of water, sanitation, and hygiene services. She has led and contributed to research across high, middle and low-income country settings, with a focus on East Africa.

Building the evidence base to understand and improve menstrual health, Julie led the development of new measures to capture menstrual health needs. She has advanced the ongoing development of national indicators and measures to monitor menstrual health, and the application of evidence synthesis methods to progress theory and research.

The Sikh Human Rights Group are excited to announce that they are currently working with Julie in order to push the United Nations to take substantive steps to persuade Member States to eliminate the Tampon Tax globally. We are also using the definition above and working with 50 other organisations from 40 different countries to create a minimum curriculum that all States should adopt when teaching menstruation in their schools and other educational institutions.



THE LION'S DEN

BY MS MONICA GILL (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

The Lion's Den, presented by the Sikh Human Rights Group, ended with a bang this month with the last guest being none other than the internationally respected Professor Raj Patel. Professor Raj Patel is a multi-sectoral academic activist whose decades of work on food sovereignty have already left a blueprint for many of us to follow and build upon. His work ranges from documentaries like the recent '**The Ant and the Grasshopper**' as well as multiple thought-provoking books and articles.

As the last episode of the Lion's Den, Season 2 wrapped up, we couldn't help but reflect on all the conversations that we have had over the past two months. They all brought us to this final discussion. The purpose of the season was to highlight the importance of coalition building and joining forces with people from other movements and grassroots organisations.

When trying to create an impact or bring about change, it's important to understand how small we are and how big the institutions we are fighting against are. However, when peasant movements from across the globe come together and join forces, they become more powerful than any institution or Government. Remember, the power of the people is greater than the systems of oppression.

One of the greatest examples of this is the **Battle in Seattle** of 1999. It was a great example of class-based solidarity and the first time the 'new world' understood the 'power of the people'. Working people across the world (and some disgruntled workers on the inside) came together and essentially shut down the World Trade Organisation, which essentially shut down American imperialism. It wasn't permanent, of course, but it was a great example of what can happen when movements come together.

One of the things that we have noticed within the Punjabi Diaspora is that we are strong when movements start. We unite, we make noise, we come together, and we are strong. However, we have a harder time understanding the nuanced details about what is actually going on behind the scenes and therefore we have a harder time maintaining the movement long-term and actually bringing about consequential change. We get sidetracked. It is important to understand that the issues that currently plague Punjab are not exclusive to Punjab but are the same across the Global South. It is essential to learn how other regions are coping and what they have done to find solutions so that we too may prosper. We hope that through the Lion's Den, we were able to bring some of these solutions to light!



A POTENTIAL POST-ROE AMERICA

BY MS SUKHMANI MANDAIR (INTERNS AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

On Monday the 2nd of May 2022, a draft opinion of the United States Supreme Court was leaked by POLITICO. This leaked draft opinion presented a full abrogation of the precedents set by **Roe v Wade (1973)** and **Planned Parenthood v Casey (1992)**. **Roe v Wade** was the landmark case that protected a woman's right to choose to have an abortion without Government restriction and **Planned Parenthood v Casey** ruled that the laws of spousal awareness before obtaining an abortion were invalid and unconstitutional under the protection of the 14th amendment. These cases had provided important precedents on the reproductive rights of women and the subsequent privacy laws were called into question, and also demonstrated social and legal progress as they worked towards the achievement of full civil rights. The leaked draft opinion included statements from Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito (who delivered the majority opinion of the court) expressing the view that **Roe and Casey** must be overruled as there is no mention of abortion in the Constitution and that **Roe v Wade** was '*egregiously wrong from the start*'. The overturning of **Roe** would make it no longer federally legal to obtain an abortion - the power would reside in the states but already 27 states have publicly said that they will be banning abortions entirely. The overturning of **Casey** makes it possible for the country to return to a time where spousal awareness was required to obtain contraception - in essence, a woman's body would belong to a man or a partner that she has not yet met. This leaked draft opinion has caused an uproar as well as uprisings in the United States and has left many wondering whether the opinion will become reality. In light of the steady encroachment of conservatism in the Supreme Court over the years, and the overwhelming power handed to the Supreme Court, it is highly likely.

The elimination of protected reproductive rights for women will have devastating effects. For instance, by causing the loss of personal and medical autonomy, it reduces women to second-class citizens unable to enjoy their full civil rights, human rights and liberties. This would regress the nation's laws and general social order by over half a century, thrusting the country into an era when women were classified as childbearing vessels. Without access to safe abortions, hundreds of thousands of women will have to unwillingly carry their pregnancies to term or seek unsafe and illegal options. This decision would both criminalize women and undermine women's health. The burden of this decision would not fall on wealthier women with the financial means to travel to another state (possibly even another country) to receive the reproductive services they require. Rather, the burden will fall on poor women, women of colour, and women who simply cannot afford to or do not have the means to receive the required abortion services. Senator Elizabeth Warren perfectly characterised this draft opinion as a transgression by the privileged, in both the state legislatures and the Supreme Court, against the poor and powerless.

This Supreme Court opinion, if finalised and made official, would subjugate women to archaic standards and open the door to further legalising right-wing extremism, depicting an extremely grim post-Roe America built on fallacious foundations. The hypocrisy of Alito's opinion is important to note - Justice Alito bases the opinion to overturn **Roe** and **Casey** on their 'unconstitutionality'. Yet consistent polling has shown that the majority of United States citizens support **Roe v Wade** and wish for it to be upheld (by a margin of more than 2:1), but due to the strategic construction of a conservative majority on the Supreme Court bench over the last decade, the Court, in no way whatsoever, represents the United States as a whole, as the Constitution intended it to. This, in and of itself, represents a tyranny of religious fundamentalism that has encroached into the public sphere and has steadily eroded its democracy.

The harmful language used in this opinion by Justice Alito takes direct aim at the social progress made in the last 60 years. For example, the GOP has publicly admitted to believing that women's right to birth control, multiple privacy laws, same-sex marriage, and interracial marriage should never have been made federally legal and now we see the manifestation of their beliefs with the power they hold in the Supreme Court. As well as the hypocrisy of the Republican Party in their definition of 'constitutionality', it is especially important to realise their 'intrinsic desire' to save children lacks meaning when they cannot provide paid leave for families or affordable access to healthcare and childcare, have poor social assistance for poor families, allow 50% of American waterways to be polluted, and have 17 million children struggling with hunger. Clearly, the issue has less to do with a moral desire to save children than an ongoing appetite for controlling, oppressing, and persecuting women.

A POTENTIAL POST-ROE AMERICA

BY MS SUKHMANI MANDAIR (INTERNS AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

This draft will not only affect women's reproductive rights, but the likely establishment of this leaked opinion would become the catalyst for a plethora of other socially progressive laws to become overturned. Under the Court's absolutist reasoning of the lack of inclusion of abortion in the Constitution, issues such as same-sex marriage, access to contraception, and even interracial marriage would have to be contested as these issues share many similar features of **Roe v Wade**. It's those specific features that Justice Alito defines as entirely unconstitutional. The reasoning of Justice Alito and the supporting Justices would force the United States back to the incredibly oppressive time when women, people of colour, and the LGBTQ+ community, were deemed second-class citizens in the supreme law of the land. This not only violates the Constitutional and democratic guarantee to self-determination, autonomy, and freedom but it violates fundamentally understood basic human rights. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) explains that a key factor in modern human rights is the concept of personal autonomy. The drafted opinion wholly rejects this, as well as the UDHR's Articles on equality, life, and liberty.

Yet, if this decision were to be finalised in June or July, there is still a way in which the U.S. Government can prevent it from fully taking effect. With a Democratic majority, the United States Congress is still capable of writing and passing a law to protect abortion rights - even with the roadblock of the filibuster, many politicians have agreed that this is within reach. Equally important is the public uproar and outcry that this leaked draft has created. The countless protests and acts of civil disobedience against the leaked opinion have placed enormous pressure on Congress and the House of Representatives to end their lull of inaction and finally enact change, protect fundamental rights, and prevent the nation from regressing into an archaic age. Political advocacy and participation are the backbones of the United States' democracy and every social movement that has occurred have been a direct result of it. The consequential severity of the draft opinion has energised the women's movement and, hopefully, in the same way, in which the Jim Crow laws propelled the civil rights activists of the 50s and 60s, this Supreme Court decision will motivate our modern activists to generate progression within the U.S. public sphere.



FOUR WAYS TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

BY MS DEMI-LEIGH SHANNON-WILBRAHAM (A-LEVEL STUDENT UNDERTAKING WORK EXPERIENCE WITH THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

There are numerous ways in which you can help to combat climate change and that you can do almost every day. This for example could be recycling which is very common in most households. However, a large majority of the wider population still unconsciously has a major negative effect on climate change which will be discussed below.

One easy way of combating climate change is to reduce the production of and use of plastics. In food supermarkets, the price of a plastic bag is in most cases 90% cheaper than reusable bags leading the consumer to buy plastic bags which creates a butterfly effect- whereby a small change makes an impact over a period of time whether it is large or small.

Another way of combating climate change is to take steps to protect our oceans. This can be done by putting pressure on our Government to reduce our reliance on plastic generally or by remembering to recycle the plastic that you use in your daily life. Our oceans absorb vast amounts of carbon dioxide. That is extremely beneficial for all life and ecosystems under and out of water.

Another way of combating climate change is by investing in renewable energy. For example, solar panels. Solar panels are an eco-friendly source of generating electricity and are commonly fitted on the roofs of new buildings. The renewable energy sector currently creates 5x more job opportunities than companies that traditionally rely upon fossil fuels! The number of jobs in the renewable energy sector grew from 1.7 million in 2004 to 11.5 million in 2019.

Finally, another easy and cheap way of helping to combat the climate emergency is by using public transport more regularly. This helps reduce our overall emission of greenhouse gases which are detrimental to the environment and to all life on earth.

Therefore, in conclusion, there are various other ways in which you can help to combat the climate emergency such as improving and encouraging vegan diets, discouraging the production of fast fashion, protecting wildlife and their habitats and encouraging large non-renewable production companies to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Although some of these ways of combating climate change may not be accessible to you alone. Therefore, it is extremely important to remember that the collaboration of people can make a real and tangible difference!



United Nations Engagement Opportunities 2022

Want to contribute to a written and oral
statement at the United Nations
Human Rights Council?



We are currently searching for secondary school and undergraduate students to help us prepare our written and oral statements on climate change adaptation and mitigation for the United Nations Human Rights Councils 2022 Regular Sessions:

We want to empower you to have your say, at a truly international event, on how every member of our global society can overcome the many challenge and issues of climate change

Through online presentations and simple practical projects you will learn more about the United Nations and how you can become involved

Enhance your CV and UCAS applications whilst simultaneously learning more about climate change and how it can be overcome

To apply please send an expression of interest statement to:

carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo