

# 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 MAY 2022 NEWSLETTER

## DIRECTORS NOTE

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

Our May Newsletter is a bit late. That's because June is a very busy month for our engagements at the United Nations Human Rights Council. In other words, the end of May along with the beginning of June is all about preparing for the United Nations Human Rights Councils June to July Regular Session. For instance, Sikh Human Rights Groups (SHRGs) team has started engaging in several forums of the United Nations, promoting a perspective on international issues that we believe is from GuruSikhi.

The SHRG has two advocacy officers in Geneva and two in New York. We have also recently opened a new office in Geneva. There are also two policy researchers and human rights officers based in our headquarters in London.

Over the last two years, we have been taking on a number of volunteer interns. Who want to understand and learn about the United Nations, the various human rights issues that we are engaged in and develop their knowledge about how decisions are made at an international level.

The SHRG now has a well-developed programme for volunteer interns and we like to think that they are enjoying their stint with us. For example and amongst various other matters, we provide our interns with the opportunity to contribute to our newsletters - as you will see in this and previous editions.

Consistent with our aim of tackling discrimination, the SHRG has been continuing to address discrimination against women. It is an anomaly of our times that whereas there are many policies and action plans to tackle discrimination against women, they are discriminated against during one of the most natural times of their lives, that is menstruation.

Policies are made under the term 'menstrual hygiene'. This falls into the trap of calling this wholly natural phenomenon an 'illness' or an 'unhygienic time' that in turn also gives the impression of needing 'medically assisted hygiene'. Quite a few cultures marginalise women during this time because they consider them to be 'unhygienic'. However, the SHRG, like many other organisations, believe that the correct terminology should be menstrual health so it is considered part of the regular health of a menstruating person. That in turn takes away the stigma that is prevalent in many of our global societies.

In many countries, the products that are required to manage menstruation are taxed! Whilst health products that are primarily targeted at men are rarely ever taxed. Even if there is a tax on a product necessary for a man, it is usually a health product and taxed at a very low rate - Discrimination? It doesn't take a lawyer to work that out. Consequently, the SHRG is campaigning to remove VAT and the other taxes that are imposed upon menstrual health products.

Thirdly, menstrual health products need to be made available to women who cannot afford them, just as safe drinking water is for people who are unable to afford metered or bottled water. This is extremely important as unsafe products often cause infections and disease.

Therefore, the SHRG will be taking this issue up at various UN forums and hopes, along with other like-minded NGOs and activists that this discriminatory practice will end.

Our Sikh Neurodiversity Network project has now started to develop further with many families finding it extremely helpful. Especially in terms of learning from one another and getting professional help and assistance in accessing support services. Therefore, the SHRG believes that through the United Nations, this project can be used as a model for religious and community establishments around the world to look at and develop within their own communities.

If anyone feels that they wish to assist the SHRG in any way or in our projects then please feel free to write to us through our website. We are always looking for volunteers!

Your sincerely,

*Dr Jasdev Singh Rai*



# WELCOME TO OUR MAY 2022 NEWSLETTER

## EDITORS NOTE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

(HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER & PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE SHRG)

Welcome to the May 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 me via email at [carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo](mailto: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)



# 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:** 17 July 2022 (Sunday)

**Time:** 13:00 - 15:00 (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**



# Parent And Carers Coffee Mornings



Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall is delighted to announce that we will be hosting a weekly coffee morning for parents and carers, every Monday from 09:30 to 11:00 starting from the 13th of June 2022.

Come and meet other parents and carers with similar experiences as well as child development experts. This space is for you to find out what is going on in the local area to support your child's needs and to get support from individuals with similar lived experiences.

For more information please contact Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall, Guru Nanak Road, Southall, UB2 4NP via:

[carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo](mailto:carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo)

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GURDWARA SRI GURU  
SINGH SABHA  
SOUTHALL

# **MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY**

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

## **When is Menstrual Hygiene Day, and what is it?**

Menstrual Hygiene Day takes place on the 28th of May every year. It is a chance to highlight the importance of menstrual care and raise awareness about the issues faced by those who don't have access to menstrual products.

Access to menstrual products, safe, healthy spaces in which to use them, and the right to manage menstruation without shame or stigma, are essential for anyone who menstruates.

But for too many, that's not the reality.

## **Menstrual Hygiene Day Theme 2022**

The theme of Menstrual Hygiene Day 2022 is to make menstruation a normal fact of life by 2030. The overarching goal is to build a world where no one is held back because they menstruate by 2030.

## **Periods and Humanitarian Disasters**

Women who have lost everything as a result of humanitarian crises tell us that among the essential items they need are sanitary towels, wipes and soap.

Without menstrual products, women, girls and people who menstruate are forced to use improvised materials to manage their periods, including torn pieces of clothing and rags, which can often cause infections.

In humanitarian emergencies, ActionAid provides essential kits which can include soap, menstrual products and clean underwear, helping people manage their periods safely, and with dignity.

## **Supporting Refugees with Menstrual Products**

13-year-old Wesal's mother was killed in an airstrike on their home in Syria. Her father and grandmother tried to take Wesal and her sisters to Jordan – but at the border, her father was arrested and taken back to Syria.

Now, Wesal and her three sisters are being brought up by their grandmother, Azziza, in Jordan. Without their mum and dad, the family are struggling to get by.

Wesal started her period last year when she was 12. Now, Azziza has to face the agonising choice of whether to buy food or menstrual products for her granddaughters when they have their periods.

## **Sanitary Pads Changing Lives in Malawi**

In Malawi, ActionAid is providing training for communities on how to make reusable, low-cost sanitary pads. These simple sanitary pads are changing lives.

Before, girls who couldn't afford sanitary pads often felt unable to go to school because they were teased if their clothes became stained.

Now, not only are girls able to stay in school, but others in the community are able to build long-term businesses by selling their extra pads at the market. This provides women with opportunities to earn an income and support their families.

# MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY

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

## Sikh Human Rights Group & Menstrual Health Day

Whilst the Sikh Human Rights Group, along with the 50 other organisations who are members of the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, stand with the work and attention that Menstrual Hygiene Day brings regarding the push for adequate water and sanitation services that will help people who menstruate manage their menstruation, we do not believe that it goes far enough to tackle the challenges women face globally because of the way institutions and States are set up to leave women out.

By changing the name to Menstrual Health Day, we would be widening the conversation. In other words, we would not be limited to the discussion on access to clean water and sanitation, but we would explore the topic further.

On the 21st of June 2022, we are due to make a statement at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 50th Regular Session. Specifically, at the Panel on Menstrual Hygiene Management, Human Rights and Gender Equality. Whilst we feel that WASH and Menstrual Hygiene Day is doing truly invaluable work when it comes to access to facilities to allow people who menstruate to stay safe and hygienic, we feel that there needs to be a more aggressive push on sufficient education, access, and empowerment on menstruation.

We at the SHRG believe that **Resolution 47/4** has done substantial work however we recognise that it can go further and the discussion can be broadened.

For example and as stated by the World Bank, in relation to the challenge taken on with regards to Menstrual Hygiene Day:

*"The taboos and stigmas attached to menstruation lead to an overall culture of silence around the topic, resulting in limited information on menstruation and menstrual hygiene..."*

All of these issues exist because menstruation is still such a taboo topic. In other words, we are losing the language of menstruation as so many people are adopting 'code words'. Even using the word hygiene when it comes to menstrual education, in general, makes women feel dirty and ashamed of one of the most natural bodily functions to exist.

Changing the name to Menstrual Health Day and having a panel on menstrual health will allow us to tackle issues of child marriage; gendered-based tax discrimination; environmental impacts; lack of access to an appropriate education; the rights of the child; right to work as well as access to adequate water and sanitation.





# AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT DON'T UNDERSTAND OR DON'T WANT TO UNDERSTAND?

BY MR DANIEL J NEWMAN (SEN RESEARCH & ENGAGEMENT OFFICE) (LONDON OFFICE)

Undertaking a quick Google search will tell you that at least 15-20% of the global population are 'neurodiverse' and according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 1-in-100 children have Autism - although we can never be exactly sure of the exact numbers, so the true figure is likely to be a lot higher. But let's put that into a real-life situation: in the 2020-2021 academic year, there were 8.9 million school students in the UK, and based on the 1-in-100 students diagnosed with Autism or Autism Spectrum Conditions statistic, that is approximately 89,000 students who possess Autism and if you divide that by the 24,000 schools currently operating in the UK that equals 3.7. That means that approximately 3.7 children per school have Autism. Children with ASD get (or are legislatively entitled to get) a lot of support at school, so why doesn't that happen for adults in the workplace?

I know, from personal experience, that there is a lack of understanding of Autism or Autism Spectrum Conditions within the regulated employment market. However, a lot of the time it is a case of not understanding or a lack of education, as opposed to not wanting to understand. From my current research, in the majority of employment sectors, there is very little training for Autism, so it will not come as a surprise that employment rates (for those with Autism) are also extremely low - according to current statistics just 20% of people with Autism are in employment. 'But why?' - is the question that we should be asking. With figures like this, it feels as though it is us against them; we need to make changes if we are going to see these statistics and the quality of life and overall well-being of people with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism improve.

We all have (or should have) heard about the positive qualities and traits that people with Autism possess, so why are businesses not exploiting this when hiring? It almost seems as though businesses don't want to take the risk; maybe they fear it or are scared of it. Nevertheless, one aspect that is positive to see is there are more exclusive businesses for Autistic people emerging, like Auticon - a Los Angeles-based technology company. In a BBC article from 2019, an American writer and journalist named Mr Steve Silberman encouraged businesses to employ more people with Autism saying:

*'For many Autistic people, if they find a place where they feel supported and feel their skills can thrive they became very devoted and loyal and don't move on. And that saves companies money because they don't have to retrain people...'*

All it takes is for companies to start to take on more neurodiverse people, and I am sure that they will see improvements across the business.

**Please look out for our information guides on Autism and Employment coming soon...**

**For more information please [click here](#)**





# CANCER ALLEY

## ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM REARS IT'S UGLY HEAD YET AGAIN

BY MS APRIL HAMILTON (INTERNS AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

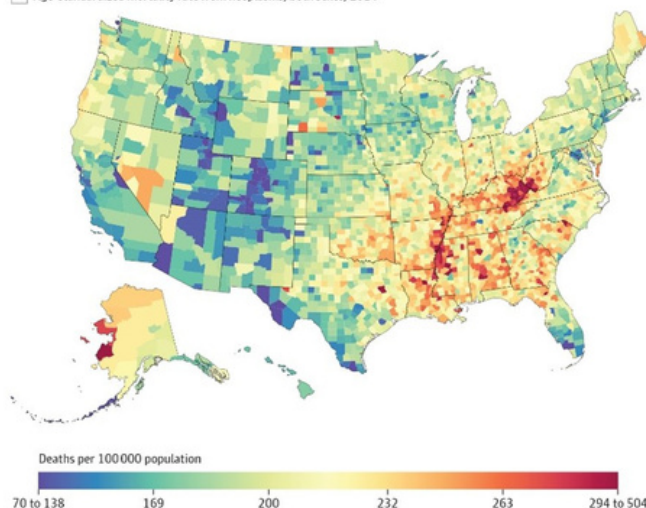
With the increase in asthma diagnoses worldwide resulting from worsening air pollution and many other issues, it is no surprise that more people are becoming concerned with the disease and airborne pollutants. Unfortunately, the health impact of airborne pollutants disproportionately affects specific groups in the United States, namely poverty-stricken African Americans and Latinos. This is especially so in the southeast region, where redlining has resulted in minority communities being situated near factories and extraction sites of dangerous chemicals such as petroleum and Styrofoam. This phenomenon is known as environmental racism, described as *'environmental injustice that occurs within a racialized context both in practice and policy'*. These injustices vary in how impactful they are on the communities and the way these injustices manifest, be it poor water quality or air pollution. An example that garnered attention worldwide was the Flint Water Crisis, but there is a less known and far wider-reaching example known as the 'Cancer Alley'.

Also called the 'Cancer Belt', this region ranges from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Being along the Mississippi River, manufacturers have an incentive to establish themselves in the area, negatively impacting residents. As the name suggests, the region is characterised by increased cancer deaths, which are linked to increased carcinogens in the form of air pollutants. Similarly, communities of colour in the area face higher instances of infant mortality and respiratory illness such as asthma. It is no surprise that cancer rates in the south are more prevalent compared to the broader United States.

The federal government has taken actions to reduce the intensity and impact of air pollution, such as the **Clean Air Act** of 1990 and the more recent **Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis (2021)**. Even so, matters such as Cancer Alley are increasingly essential to manage. While we all cannot directly create policies, putting pressure on the government to enact change, be it through protest, working with non-profit organisations, contacting local and federal officials, or simply educating oneself and others, is necessary.



A Age-standardized mortality rate from neoplasms, both sexes, 2014



## THE ETHICS OF TRAVELLING

### CAN TRAVELLING BE CONSTRUED AS A FORM OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

BY MS RHEA SOMAIYA (INTERN AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

In our postcolonial world, the ethics behind interactions between cultures has become blurred. Humanity is stuck behind social norms, historical structures and a lack of social mobility.

Therefore as a direct result of this, humanity does not have access to each other and the concept of humanity itself becomes lost in history and the lead up to the modern-day.

So, whilst living in society, power structures determine our lives and livelihoods. Unfortunately, this has a lot to do with the construction of society under colonisation. The way we perceive, interact and understand people across the globe is seen through the eyes of the 'other'. This othering and otherness transcends to an alienation of the 'other' making non-white individuals a spectacle ready to investigate and explore.

This exploration tends to yield itself to the present-day concepts of 'freeing yourself', 'finding yourself' and 'immersing yourself' in traditions and cultures that differ from those found in the Global North and western assumptions of modernity.

Some may ask what the issue is with looking elsewhere and understanding the breadth and depth of humanity, but as shared before, history does not let humanity simply be.

One of the issues lives in the concept of exploration itself as it derives from the unethical anthropological beginnings of western infatuation with the Global South. In other words, exploring people's lifestyles in a position of power disassociates people from each other. To peer at people on your guided tours re-asserts the gap between the coloniser and colonised. Therefore, to find yourself through existing as another for a moment of your life relieves you of the realities and real-life consequences of those societies.

This is where I believe what I have described is a form of cultural appropriation.

Cultural appropriation can be defined as a society or person in a position of power using or utilising indigenous culture for personal gain.

From this definition, it may be safe to say that the essence of utilising culture or cultures to 'find yourself' is a form of appropriation and that's where the problem lies.

Embracing a culture for a moment of time without having to deal with the consequences of those people's lives and livelihoods is a postcolonial privilege.

It's arguably an unusual experience where you allow yourself to appreciate what you have at the expense of another. And that 'other' is not underprivileged by chance, they have been exploited for generations and are now used as a tool for tourism.

The irony can be difficult to wrap your head around. However, although travelling can be seen through this lens, it is equally important to know that one individual is not responsible for postcolonial privilege. It is a product of hundreds of years of exploitation, therefore, tourists in the modern day cannot necessarily hold much accountability for the gruesome irony that travelling the Global South holds.

I do believe that you can relieve yourself of the irony though. Practising to decolonise your mind while looking through a lens of humanness rather than 'otherness' is the first step to alleviating the Global South of being constructed as a glass cage, ready to be explored as a human zoo.

# United Nations Engagement Opportunities 2022

A large, faint watermark of the United Nations logo is centered in the background. It features a world map with latitude and longitude lines, surrounded by a laurel wreath.

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:

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