



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

(NGO WITH SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS AT THE UNITED NATIONS)

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We have had a growth year in 2021 with more staff, more interns and more in-depth research leading to more engagements at the United Nations. The Sikh Human Rights Group's (SHRG) work is primarily focused on the United Nations.

The SHRG takes a pluralistic approach to issues, trying to look at issues from several perspectives and looking at solutions that work from different perspectives. It is of the view that diversity is one of nature's most enduring strengths and also in human society. Universalising ideologies and solutions to issues often lead to tensions.

In 2021, the big issue that landed on our doorstep was the matter of the Three Farm Laws instituted by the Government of India and which were opposed by farmers in Punjab and Haryana. We were inundated by calls to take the matter to international forums.

Small farms is not an issue that the SHRG has been involved in before. As we looked at the issue, it became clear that this was not just a Punjab-Haryana issue nor just an India issue. The threat to small farms is a global issue. Associated with it are issues of poverty, gender inequalities, environmental degradation, climate change, health, biodiversity, water and healthy diets. There are also pronounced issues of justice and human rights.

The SHRG takes a global perspective on the themes that it works on. The small farms issue affects farmers across the world, whether in India, China, Africa, South America or even in the USA and Europe. Working on it has been challenging as we have had to look at the worldwide consequences of the threats to small farms.

SHRG's team engaged in a multiplatform approach. It engaged the United Nations, held press conferences, gave critical information, utilised social media and held a number of expert discussions. For instance, during our social media series entitled the Lion's Den.

We also found that the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have a large bearing on the plight of small farmers. Consequently, the SHRG is now campaigning for the WTO's rules to be more small farm-friendly. We are working with several NGOs as well as countries on this. We are working with several NGOs as well as countries on this. It is our view that the Indian government itself may have been...



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

influenced by WTO pressure to bring in the Three Farm Laws. We, therefore, decided to take the issue to the source of the problem.

SHRG's work on the environment, climate change and sustainable development has also started on some milestones. SHRG's policy approach is that almost all civilisations, cultures, belief systems and communities have some concepts or philosophies on human relations to the environment, the earth and the cosmos. There have also been rituals, practices, festivals and rules within them reflecting their perspectives on nature. SHRG is therefore of the opinion that these need to be nurtured as people are most inspired to be active when inspired by their backgrounds. SHRG is also engaged in the wider scientific-based debates on climate change and the environment.

In 2021 the focus was on encouraging young people to be more engaged in climate-related and environmental issues. They were excited by their participation at COP26. Since then a number of events have been held with their participation.

SHRG has also held a number of podcasts on climate change and environmental issues with some eminent academics and practitioners.

SHRG's work on disabilities and discrimination embarked upon a project to make children and young adults on the neurodiversity spectrum feel more included in their local religious and community institutions as well in their everyday social interactions. SHRG found that many community institutions were ill-prepared to deal with children and young adults with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism. The project has been welcomed by parents and has successfully started to bring greater awareness as well as inclusivity within community institutions for children and young adults with lifelong neurological characteristics.

On gender issues, the SHRG is concerned about the continuing discrimination against females. During its course of engagement on gender issues, it started working with several NGOs on removing taxation on menstrual health and hygiene products. Menstruation is a natural part of all women between certain ages. It is not a luxury lifestyle nor a phenomenon that women can give up. It is part of female health. Taxing products that are essential to the hygienic management of menstruation is a form of discrimination, particularly as health products are generally not taxed in many parts of the world...

A wooden gavel rests on a scroll titled "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". The scroll is unrolled, showing the title in a cursive font. The gavel is dark wood with a light-colored handle. The background is a blurred image of a bookshelf filled with books.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The SHRG also found that a lack of adequate education and information on menstruation leads to nervousness and disease amongst many young girls around the world. This is usually due to taboos expressed around menstruation in many cultures and communities. In 2021, the SHRG started to raise these issues at the United Nations and started working with a plethora of global NGOs for a concerted effort to remove the taxation of menstrual health products, change words that feed prejudices around menstruation and also improve menstrual education as well as decoupling it as a subject thought in schools from sex education where this is or can be an issue.

Privacy is increasingly being eroded on many fronts, particularly through the internet and especially through artificial intelligence. There is a lot of data mining without the knowledge or consent of the individuals targeted. There is also a great deal of misuse and sometimes distortions of this data as well as an intrusion into people's lives. The SHRG is doing quite a bit of work on Artificial Intelligence, human rights and responsibilities.


SHRG's core operational team expanded in 2021. There are now two Human Rights Officers in New York, two in Geneva and two Human Rights Officers and Project Coordinators in London who are leading our research. 2021 also saw the SHRG take on a number of interns and volunteers. They have been an invaluable part of our work, particularly in regards to taking on research, organising events and representing the SHRG at domestic and international conferences and events.

SHRG affiliates have been active in their fields. They produce their own reports. That can be viewed on their respective websites.

Funds are always an issue as the SHRG relies on voluntary funds. It is hoped that as our work is better known and understood, funding will improve and help the SHRG engage in more issues.

In 2021, the SHRG set up a Patron's Group that is helping to fund our work in North America. We are also hoping to set up a Patron's Group in the UK as well.

We look forward to more interactive engagement with our readers, new patrons, new associate members and new affiliates.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our annual report has most of the features of the Sikh Human Rights Group's work during 2021. There were other projects that also started in 2021 but they were either in a policy-making state or just initiated in 2021. These have not been included.

Farm Laws

The Farm Laws issue in India was a challenge for the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) as it had no experience in this field.

To give you a brief background the President's proclamation was introduced on the 27th of September 2020, using emergency powers to force new laws around farm produce and support for farming. However, the laws were seen by India's farmers as a backdoor attempt to replace them with large commercial farming. In other words, the laws were introducing competition from private traders against the state-established Mandis (protected procurement markets) and thus were seen by the farmers as the road to remove minimum prices for crops. The laws were also seen as an underhanded method of denying farmers access to India's domestic courts in cases of disputes.

India has already signed the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas 2018**. That insists that any laws to be enacted are enacted with proper consultations between all relevant stakeholders, the setting of a minimum price for crops to ensure that the subject farmers can make a living and ensuring that the farmers have appropriate access to their domestic courts.

The SHRG pointed this out. Dr Darshanpal addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council as a representative of the SHRG and appraised it of the threats to India's farmers from these laws. In addition, we also held an Online Press Conference at the Geneva Press Club. Where the farmer leaders expressed their concerns in more detail.

The laws were finally repealed by the Indian Government. It is a testament to the strength of Indian democracy that they were taken back.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Environment

The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) believes that a pluralist approach to tackling environmental degradation and climate change will encourage civil society around the world to take ownership of the aforementioned issues. Too often the United Nations and other international forums tend to universalise approaches, particularly in the formation of ethics of the environment. Ethics are usually based on the worldviews of cultures or civilisations. Human beings have had ideas and theories about our environment for as long as human societies have existed. Most cultures and civilisations have had a reverence for the environment. Therefore, the SHRG believes that this reverence needs to be resurrected for people to become responsive to the deterioration that is taking place around us.

Besides expanding upon the above this report also gives a synopsis and website links to our engagements at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) in the environmental field. The UN HRC takes a human rights approach.

This report also contains brief descriptions of the many podcasts that the SHRG has held with various academics and practitioners in the environmental field.

Furthermore, in 2021 the SHRG took a number of youth ambassadors to COP26. The primary objective of this initiative was to upscale their skills and knowledge. They were thrilled and have continued to engage in environmental projects primarily targeted at and/or for young people. For example, this report explains how our Youth Ambassadors are beginning to engage with their local communities in order to plan for individual and collection action to address the many challenges and imminent threats of climate change.

A person in a wheelchair is on a sandy beach, holding a large bunch of colorful balloons. The person is facing away from the camera, looking out towards the ocean. The sky is clear and blue, and the water is calm. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sikh Neurodiversity Network Project

It was noted during the COVID-19 pandemic that children and young adults with lifelong neurological characteristics, such as Autism, were often stuck at home without their parents or carers benefitting from any moral or social support. Therefore and with the financial help of the National Lottery, our Sikh Neurodiversity Network project was born.

For Sikhs, active engagement within the network of Gurdwaras is an important form of social, spiritual and emotional support. Therefore, our Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator (Mr Carlos Arbuthnott) worked with Gurdwaras in the UK, to increase their awareness of neurodiversity, to establish and maintain a social network between families with children with lifelong neurodiversity characteristics and to create the right atmosphere within Gurdwaras for children and young adults with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism.

The project experienced some difficulties to start with. Primarily, owing to the far-reaching negative effects and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However as families and Gurdwara bodies began to develop confidence in each other, the network began to evolve. Family-orientated focus groups helped to shape the project. Experts in neurodiversity and Gurdwara executive members were brought in to help parents and carers as well as to construct the project with relevant sensitivities.

Audio-Visual educational resources were created. Simplified presentational materials were produced for Gurdwara management committee members and staff. Technical presentations were also produced for senior Gurdwara management members who wished to upscale their knowledge base in neurodiversity.

In the early period, most of our conferences and meetings were held via Zoom, but as restrictions lifted, drop-in sessions were started with parents and carers who brought their children to the Gurdwara.

The network has identified a number of needs, set its aims and established targets. The project is guided by its slogan, '**Advocate, Educate, Love, Accept**'. The targets are explained in detail in this report. The need for resources is also explained. The report also gives details of the sessions held, lessons learnt and the way forward.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Menstrual Empowerment Project

Our Human Rights, Communications and Media Officer (Ms Bethan Walters) noted that menstruation is an issue that continues to be a victim of gender discrimination. Products to manage menstruation are taxed in many countries. Many young girls cannot afford them and turn to sell their bodies for sexual intercourse simply to buy menstrual products. Some miss school. In some cultures, a menstruating girl is considered to be ready for marriage and thus is forced into child marriage.

Consequently, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) will work within the UN system to lobby countries to remove the tampon tax, assist with the free distribution of menstrual products and for the UN to draft a curriculum on menstruation that can be taught independently of other subjects. This will improve menstrual health management and remove the stigmas that society has often attached to this wholly natural phenomenon.

This report also highlights webinars that the SHRG has orchestrated, our engagement with experts and the UN, SHRG's plural approach to this issue and explains why removing the tampon tax is in accordance with or upholds the objectives of the **Vienna Declaration on Human Rights on Gender Dignity and Equality 1993**.

This report also explains SHRGs proposition for an international advisory body on menstrual education that will try and standardise information and education around this issue. We also provide our aims and objectives for 2022 and beyond.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Technologies and the Right to Privacy

This report highlights the Sikh Human Rights Group's (SHRG) position on new technologies and the right to privacy. It explains SHRG's advocacy for a binding international agreement that ensures that every individual living in our global society has ownership of their personal data.

Secondly, it highlights SHRG's aim to raise awareness amongst communities on how improper use of their personal data can jeopardise the enjoyment of their other fundamental rights, such as the right to be free from discrimination, and the right to freedom of expression and belief.

Amongst SHRG's proposals is an awareness-raising project for Swiss school children. That is hoped will be commenced in 2022.

This report also provides website links to the two written statements submitted by the Sikh Human Rights Group to the United Nations Human Rights Council. It gives information about SHRG's engagement within the UN Human Rights Council on the issue of new technologies and the rights to privacy.

Miscellaneous

Towards the end of this report, there are a number of appendices related to the above issues.

Finally, we very much hope that you will read this report and become inspired by our work. Therefore, if you do wish to get involved in any of our ongoing projects then please do not hesitate to get in contact with us via email:

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A photograph showing a protest on a road. In the foreground, several police officers in riot gear (helmets, shields, batons) are facing a group of people. There is a lot of white smoke or tear gas in the air. In the background, more people are walking on the road, some carrying flags. The scene is chaotic and appears to be a moment of conflict or a large-scale demonstration.

ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The Indian Farm Laws have been repealed. India's Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, bowed to the democratic wish of a large contingent of his citizens and after a brief apology that he hadn't been able to persuade them of the merits of the laws, announced repealing them.

Nearly half of the Indian population works directly or indirectly in the agricultural sector. Over 85% of farms in India are small farms, ranging from one hectare to five hectares. Three states, Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are essentially agrarian states. Most farmers suspected that the laws, enacted formally with the President's assent on the 27th of September 2020, would push them into bankruptcy and force them to sell their lands to large agribusinesses. Generally, people suspected that the laws were a backdoor attempt to sweep away small farms and introduce large scale farming in India comparable to the mega-farms that can be found in Canada, the USA and Australia.

There was justification in their suspicions. Small farming is not lucrative. It sustains the family and brings in some profits. Around the world, small farms have been supported by State subsidies. This ensures food security, reduces poverty and is helpful for the environment as well as ensuring a diversity of crops.

Furthermore, Government subsidy has been key to farming, whether large scale farms or small-scale farms. Large farms make larger profits by economies of scale. Whilst small farms make very small profits and consequently often need a larger subsidy. However, please note that this is not always the case.

Europe, China, India and parts of South America, all have small farms dependent upon subsidies from their Governments. However, this is disliked by some leading western countries with mega-farms, who want to sell their crops to developing countries. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) insidiously favours these developed countries by treating farming in the same way as manufacturing. The WTO restricts subsidies to a mere 10% above production costs. This has the effect of pushing small farmers out of business as a 10% margin on a 2-hectare farm is not enough to buy even the basic essentials for the upkeep of a family, such as education for their children, water, heating, and so on... Therefore, Governments creatively push subsidies to between 50% and 80% above production costs.

The Indian Farm Laws had three aspects that farmers found threatening to their way of life.

ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



(1) Firstly, the Government wanted to take away their subsidy, called Minimum Support Price. It wanted farmers to sell in the open market to large traders.

(2) Secondly, the Government wanted to run-down State-run markets that were set up to buy produce from farmers. Instead, the private sector was being invited to build larger but fewer centres. This would have added considerably to costs and time as the small farmers would have had to travel hundreds of miles in some cases to sell their produce.

(3) Thirdly, the Government wanted to bring in contract farming but block the small farmer's access to courts in cases of contractual disputes. Farmers would have been at the mercy of corporates interpreting the contract as they wanted. The dispute would have then been resolved by civil servants, often given to the corruption that is rife across India.

For more information please click [here](#)

THE PROTESTS

Eighteen months of a relentless and sustained protest by the farmers, that started in Punjab and then moved to the outskirts of Delhi forced the Indian Government to change its mind. The Indian public started to back the farmers and the party in Government, the BJP, started to lose votes around the country. The most spectacular loss was in the Bengal state elections.

The protest has been an incredible show of strength, endurance and determination. Men, women, children and the elderly, camped in their tractors, trolleys and tents surrounding Delhi. Food poured in and kitchens were set up. Entertainment was set up. Talks, lectures and daily briefings were set up. The leaders of the farmers, some 40 of them, showed a unique unity. The protesting farmers endured the cold, heat, rain and the COVID-19 pandemic, but refused to back down.

The protest was helped by the international community. Most of the help came from Punjabis settled around the world. But many international politicians, celebrities and academics made statements in support of the farmers.



ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS WORK ON THE ISSUE

The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) started to work on this issue quite early on. It brought out a [document](#) that showed that the Farm Laws breached the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas 2018** (UNDROP). That India had signed only 2 years before. All three farm laws contravened the main articles of the **UNDROP**.

This was picked up by the farmer leaders.

The SHRG then gave its platform to one of the farmer leaders to speak at the United Nations Human Rights Council, where Dr Darshanpal was able to explain the issue and debunk Government propaganda in a [speech](#) that only lasted 90 seconds.

The SHRG then held a [press conference](#) at the Geneva Press Club in association with Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (UK). Five of the farmer leaders were present on Zoom along with an MP from Switzerland. These actions had the result of addressing disinformation about the farmers and the laws that were circulating amongst the diplomats at the United Nations.

The SHRG continued to work quietly in order to influence the debate. Its main concerns were:

- The lack of negotiation and consultation with the farmers and their leaders;
- Denial of justice (access to courts) in disputes;
- The very real possibility of poverty deepening; and
- The devastating effect this new model would have on the environment, biodiversity, etc... should large scale farming have been allowed to take over in India.

To read SHRGs comprehensive report on this issue please [click here](#).

N.B. SHRGs comprehensive report covers the current system of policy, laws and farming in India; constitutional issues and the applicable domestic and international laws; how the Three Farm Laws got passed; the impact of the Three Farm Laws on India's agricultural sector; the international response to the farmers protest; a timetable of the farmers' protest; the police brutality; celebrities response and the repercussions; the wider international implication of the Three Farm Laws; and the benefits of small farming.



ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The SHRG also intervened at the United Nations when police heavy-handedness led to human rights violations and when the Indian Government stopped the protestors' water supplies and sanitary facilities. Concerns expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights helped to restore these facilities and check on any human rights violations.

For example, on the 5th of February 2021 the United Nations Office of Human Rights released a written statement after we urged the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Michelle Bachelet, to make a verbal and written statement regarding the human rights abuses during the farmers' protest:



For more information please click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Furthermore, during the 46th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council under Agenda: Item 2, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights made an oral statement regarding the Indian Farmers' Protest:

'In India, continued protests by hundreds of thousands of farmers highlight the importance of ensuring laws and policies are based on meaningful consultation with those concerned. I trust that ongoing dialogue efforts by both sides will lead to an equitable solution to this crisis that respects the rights of all. Charges of sedition against journalists and activists for reporting or commenting on the protests, and attempts to curb freedom of expression on social media, are disturbing departures from essential human rights principles...'



ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In addition to the above, the SHRG also submitted a [written statement](#) to UN Human Rights Council, during their 46th Regular Session, regarding the devastating effects that the Three Farm Laws would have on India's Right to Food and how the Three Farm Laws would erode small farming in India. Mr Ivan Lorenci de Francisco (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG) (Geneva Office) followed this up with an [oral intervention](#) at the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (March 2021).

On the 19th of July 2021, the SHRG organised an independent dialogue during the United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021 entitled:

The Rights of Small Farmers in Light of Corporate Take Over: The Deregulation of TNCs are Negatively Affecting the Rights of Small Farmers; How can both amicably coexist?

During our interactive dialogue, we explained to an extremely broad crosssection of our global society that with the introduction of corporations into agriculture, small farmers have faced many barriers to making ends meet. Monsanto's reported objective is '**No Food Shall Be Grown That We Don't Own**'. Right from the seeds to the crop, agribusinesses have a monopoly. They own the seed, so they own the produce. Where does the farmer fit in? How are their expenses covered and their livelihoods maintained?

Economic instability in the agricultural sector has forced our youth out of farming as a way of life. What once used to be family-owned farms have now become corporate enterprises often operated via machines. Pesticide and fertiliser use has contaminated the environment and unfair prices have created unending cycles of debt. Additionally, the supply and demand chains are unregulated, preventing crop diversification and creating soil anaemia.

Food is a basic human right - as is access to food. Each nation has the right to produce its own food while maintaining its cultural and productive diversity. A direct democratic intervention is needed, but it must understand the issues at hand; especially those of the small farmers. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we put those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than agribusinesses.



ON THE FRONTLINES: STANDING WITH SMALL FARMERS AND UPHOLDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

However, it is an oversimplification to wish agribusiness to simply 'play nice'. More needs to be thought about. How can States play a role? What type of regulations can State Governments put into place? How can farming be made more sustainable? How can farming be made more eco-friendly? Brainstorming plausible solutions to the aforementioned issues and then pushing for their implementation will help lift the burden on small farmers in the long run and ensure their survival.

Furthermore, in October 2021, we held an online event that asked: '**Why are small farmers around the globe on the brink of extinction?**'. During the interactive discussion, we unearthed the proactive steps that can be taken by all members of our global society to safeguard the rights of small farmers, the steps that can be taken to combat agribusinesses at a legal and policy level and the practical steps that can be taken by small farmers around the globe to compete with agribusinesses that are currently operating within their domestic markets. We also considered the possible alternatives to Government agricultural subsidies.

This of course is a highly technical area of global governance that requires careful planning, consideration and implementation. Consequently, it will remain one of SHRG's primary focus areas over 2022 and beyond. However, we remain hopeful that by continuing to work with UN organisations and agencies, State Governments, NGOs, transnational corporations and other business enterprises, civil society and crucially with small farmers themselves we will be able to put those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of global food systems and policies rather than agribusinesses.

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ENVIRONMENT

All human beings depend on the environment in which we live. Therefore, a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including our right to life, health, food, water and sanitation.

Without a healthy environment, we would be unable to fulfil our aspirations. In other words, we would be unable to access even the most fundamental standards that are synonymous with human dignity.

Therefore and as can clearly be seen from the above, the environment is far too important to be left just to international bodies such as the United Nations to find inspirational solutions. However, don't worry most civilisations, religions, cultures and belief systems have concepts, positions or views on how we as humans interact with the environment and how we can solve the global environmental crisis. However, it is important to bear in mind that their concepts, positions and views may not be the same and their intentions may also not be the same. Nevertheless, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) is committed to promoting a wide variety of cultural and traditional perspectives that will help us to solve global environmental issues and threats at a national, international and truly global level.

Nevertheless, ethical principles are derived from theories, revelations and inspirations. That in turn gives rise to values and practices. Consequently, our behaviour towards the environment and sustainability is very much influenced by our civilisation or native belief system. Therefore, in recent years the recognition of the links between human rights and the environment has greatly increased around the globe. The number and scope of international and domestic laws, judicial decisions and academic studies on the relationship between human rights and the environment are growing rapidly. That in turn is broadly theorised in order to answer the same set of leading questions. **For more information please [click here](#)**

The United Nations has been at the forefront in assessing the science and forging a political solution. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which brings together 2,000 leading climate change scientists, issues comprehensive scientific assessments every five or six years: in 2007, it concluded with certainty that climate change was occurring and that human activities were a primary cause. The 196 members of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are negotiating agreements to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change and help countries adapt to its effects. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and other UN agencies have been at the forefront of raising awareness.



ENVIRONMENT

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS STANCE ON THE ISSUE

Sikh Human Rights Group's (SHRG) environmental work is founded on the doctrine of pluralism. However, in order for us to unearth the meaning and significance of pluralism, it is extremely important that we first turn our attention to considering the philosophy of universalism in ethics.

The SHRG believes that there is a tendency, amongst the international environmental protection community and prominent international environmental organisations and agencies, such as the United Nations, toward universalising ethical values and attempting to form environmental protection Conventions, Treaties, regulations and agreements based on a false assumption that there is one universal set of collective values. This type of so-called universalism is the idea that one size fits all or that one universal ideology of ethics can justifiably permeate all international agreements and can therefore be directly applicable to all civilisations and cultures around the world. That this universalistic outlook is the key to solving all of the environmental issues that currently persist around the globe. However, the SHRG believes that what the above model fails to include is the fact that different people, cultures, civilisations and countries have different approaches, which also change over time, to political, economic, and social policies based on historical and cultural influences that determine their governance or their individual approaches when it comes to tackling environmental issues.

Furthermore, modern environmental thinking is not the first time that human beings have thought about their relationship with the environment and other life forms. Therefore, in SHRGs opinion, we need to stop assuming that environmental threats have suddenly dawned on us and that humanity has lived in a state of blissful ignorance until the sudden advancement of modern technology, lifestyles and environmental science.

Almost all cultures, civilizations and community belief systems have some concepts, rules and taboos that can inform us about the human relationship with the environment. This deep understanding, reverence and experience reflects the consciousness of our evolving place in the environment. For example, through our affiliates' [Repository of World Views of Nature](#) project, we can see how all indigenous peoples have sophisticated environmental protection concepts that date back to prehistory.



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However, what has occurred through the dominance of colonial legacies is that many environmental organisations and agencies marginalise the wisdoms that cultures and beliefs carry about human relationships with nature and which were embedded in traditions, customs, festivals and outlooks. Therefore, in pursuit of imposing a universal rule of law and a colonial mentality as a philosophical basis for the political doctrine underpinning our global societies, dominant culture has displaced and disenfranchised peoples' own value systems that have served the close coexistence between nature and human societies since the dawn of humankind.

Therefore, the SHRG believes that it is only when people rediscover the reverence for nature, biodiversity, and other life forms in their own way, through their own customs, beliefs and cultures that our global societies as a whole will act with greater passion for the protection of our environment, take ownership of their development and move away from what is currently found under the prevailing utilitarian, legalistic and rationalistic approach.

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS WORK ON THE ISSUE

UN ENGAGEMENT

United Nations Human Rights Council (48th Regular Session)

(1) On the 28th of September 2021 the SHRG made the following oral submission regarding the rights of indigenous peoples at the Annual Half-Day Panel Discussion on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

To watch the full video please [click here](#)

(2) On the 20th of September 2021 the SHRG made the following oral submission regarding climate change at the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development.

To watch the full video please [click here](#)



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21st Session of the IGWG on the Right to Development

(3) On the 17th of May 2021 the SHRG made the following oral submission regarding climate change at the Interactive Dialogue with the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development. **To watch the full video please [click here](#)**

United Nations Economic and Social Councils High-level Segment 2021

(4) SHRGs Written Statement Re: Strengthening the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at its 75th Anniversary for Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic and Advancing the 2030 Agenda. **To read the full statement please [click here](#) (see page 464)**

SHRG EVENTS

Interactive Panel Discussion Re: Indigenous Knowledge Systems

(1) On the 11th of August 2021 the Sikh Human Rights Group and the DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CIKS), University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa held an online interactive discussion.

Topic: Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Cultural and Biological Diversity Conservation for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

Chair: Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the SHRG)

Panellists:

- Professor Hassan Kaya and his expert team from the DSI-NRF Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems
- Dr Jasdev Rai (Director of the SHRG)

To watch the full video please [click here](#)



ENVIRONMENT

COP26 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

The SHRG aims to upskill and educate the youth of today to become the climate saviours of tomorrow.

To give you an insight into our current project between the 4th and the 6th of November 2021 our Human Rights Officers and Project Coordinators took secondary school and undergraduate students to COP26 in Glasgow (Scotland).

Our Human Rights Officers and Project Coordinators come from a range of backgrounds including UK Barristers, medical professionals, university lecturers, international relations experts and human rights campaigners who have been actively involved in a myriad of human rights issues for over 40 years.

Consequently, this provided the students with an unparalleled insight into the type and form of career paths that they may like to take but just as importantly it allowed them to gain an insight into the various ways that we as a global society can come together in order to mitigate and adapt to the negative and imminent impacts of climate change.

However, our engagement with young people does not stop there as we are thrilled to announce that we are currently searching for participants for our COP26 Youth Engagement Initiative.

The primary purpose to which is threefold:

(1) Firstly, by running a series of practitioner-led or academic-led environmental conservation workshops and seminars within schools, colleges and universities we hope to educate and upskill students from a variety of backgrounds on the practical environmental conservation methods they can undertake within their local communities, supported by us, to help their local communities plan for and/or mitigate and adapt to the negative and imminent impacts of climate change. Our hope and primary focus is on ensuring that these students or young people will then be enabled to take these project planning and implementation skills with them into later life.



(2) Secondly, we hope to benefit our local communities by having students plant trees, take part in and encourage a cycle to school and work initiative as well as host a series of student-led environmental conservation workshops, seminars and lectures for their friends, families, teachers and select members of civil society.

(3) Finally, through our Special Consultative Status at the United Nations, we will offer a select number of students the opportunity to submit written and/or oral statements at United Nations environmental conservation conferences and events in order to further cement their knowledge and commitment to helping their local communities overcome the many challenges and imminent threats of climate change.

Therefore, in summary, our objective is to provide school and university students with the requisite knowledge, training and support to become independent environmental campaigners and strengthen local community knowledge and commitment through the joint planning and implementation of practical environmental conservation projects in their locality.

Our project will support the development of long-term climate action within our local communities by engaging, educating and upskilling students and members of civil society in all of the various ways that they can individually and collectively help to mitigate and adapt to the negative and imminent impacts of climate change.

Encourage Local Communities to Plan for the Climate Emergency

Our project will encourage local communities to plan for the climate emergency by bringing together students and local community representatives to decide on, plan for and if at all possible implement joint environmental conservation projects within the local area. In other words, our ambition is not only for the students themselves to formulate and implement school, college or university-specific projects but also to co-coordinate larger projects in conjunction with local community authorities and leaders. For not only will this enhance the likelihood of these projects accurately reflecting the wider needs of the community but also the various ideological standpoints within the community.



Celebrate the Importance of Community-led Climate Action

In SHRG's opinion, young voices have often been heard but ignored during international climate change conferences and negotiations although they have been found to influence their families' attitudes more successfully than third party companies or NGOs. Therefore, we will address this by bringing together young persons and adults – who possess the necessary skills and resources that are required to amplify the voices of younger people – to decide upon areas of common agreement and understanding. We will then help them to implement their local community environmental conservation projects. Furthermore, in order to encourage their local commitment, we will incentivise them further by helping them to prepare and submit joint oral and written statements to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the importance of generational collaboration.



ENVIRONMENT

IF NOT
NOW,
WHEN?
There is no PLANET B

Students' Reflections on our Trip to COP26



Mr Brahmjot Singh
18 Years Old
University of Leicester



Ms Davina Kaur Sohal
20 Years Old
SOAS University of London

To watch the full video please click [here](#)

To watch the full video please click [here](#)



Mr Kirit Sidhu
16 Years Old
Heston Community School



Ms Navneet Sehmbi
16 Years Old
Tiffin School

To watch the full video please click [here](#)

To watch the full video please click [here](#)



ENVIRONMENT

PODCASTS (Environmental and Diversity Speaker Series)

Dr Olalekan Adekola

Recorded live on the 25th of November 2021.

Topic: Addressing Climate Change through the Lens of Environmental Geography

Panellist: Dr Olalekan Adekola from York St John University. Dr Adekola is a geographer with an interest in using interdisciplinary approaches to understanding how the costs and benefits of climate change are distributed across different socio-economic groups.

For example, he has worked extensively on research projects aimed at improving understanding and communication amongst stakeholders on climate change-related topics including but by no means limited to:

- The adaptation of urban infrastructures to enhance climate resilience.
- Co-designing sustainable aquaculture practices.
- Stakeholder engagement projects to reduce flood risks and to enhance the management of ecosystem services.

Questions include but are not limited to:

What lessons have you taken away from your research that can inform us about the most effective methods to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change? Both in terms of the physical effects and the Governance gaps that are currently persisting around the globe.

To watch the full video please [click here](#)



ENVIRONMENT

Professor Ilan Kelman

Recorded live on the 13th of October 2021.

Topic: How to save our planet from humanmade destruction

Panellist: Professor Ilan Kelman, a Professor of Disasters and Health at University College London (UK) and a Professor at the University of Agder, Kristiansand (Norway).

His overall research interest is linking disasters and health, including the integration of climate change into disaster research and health research. That covers three main areas:

- Disaster diplomacy and health diplomacy.
- Island sustainability involving safe and healthy communities in isolated locations.
- Risk education for health and disasters.

Questions include but are not limited to:

What lessons have you taken away from your research with small island nations that can inform us about the most effective methods to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change? Both in terms of the physical effects and Governance gaps that are currently persisting around the globe.

Here at the SHRC, we are strong believers that caring for the environment and human rights are mutually inclusive. In other words, strong believers in the fact that you cannot simply look at climate change in the round and not consider the wider human rights implications or violations. With that being said, could you please explain to our listeners some of the most experienced human rights that are being violated due to the negative effects of climate change?

To watch the full video please [click here](#)



ENVIRONMENT

Professor Rick Stafford

Recorded live on the 30th of September 2021.

Topic: How to save our oceans and marine life from humanmade destruction

Panellist: Professor Rick Stafford from Bournemouth University. Whose research interests cover numerous topics. For instance, a large proportion of his work is currently focused on the politics and economics of environmental issues, especially climate and biodiversity loss. It shows that 'consumer choice' is an unrealistic argument for environmental solutions, and that developed countries can not afford to continue to pursue economic growth and successfully tackle these issues, yet the Global South, with appropriate support, could contribute through 'green growth', along with significant decreases in socio-economic inequality.

More recently his work has focused on green recovery plans in the UK but plans which are also applicable to many other developed countries, and how these can contribute to climate and biodiversity solutions.

Finally, he has also worked extensively with nature-based solutions, especially in the marine environment. For example, he is particularly interested in the relatively unexplored issues of overfishing and their contribution to climate change and their well-understood contribution to biodiversity loss. For example, he has suggested that changes to fishing practices should be implemented to benefit local communities, whether deprived fishing villages in the UK or food security issues in Africa and that doing this will help local economies, as well as the overall ecology of the ocean.

Questions include are not limited to:

The oceans seem limitless, but we have come to realise that they are not. Therefore, in your expert opinion what state are our oceans in today?

To watch the full video please [click here](#)



ENVIRONMENT

Additional Podcasts

(1) Professor Jay Mistry (Royal Holloway University) (London)

Topic: Addressing Climate Change Through the Lens of Environmental Geography

To watch the full recording please [click here](#)

(2) Extinction Rebellion UK

Topic: Addressing Climate Change with a Diversity of Religious, Cultural and Indigenous Views

To watch the full recording please [click here](#)

(3) Mr Antoni Fernandes

Mr Fernandes is an award-winning environmental and human rights activist who for the last 30 years has been actively involved in forest and river preservation in the Amazon Atlantic Rainforest in Brazil.

Topic: Addressing Climate Change through International Community Engagement and Support

To watch the full recording please [click here](#)


(4) Friends of the Earth UK

Topic: Addressing Climate Change through Local Community Engagement and Support

To watch the full recording please [click here](#)

For more information please contact:

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott
Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator
London Office
Email: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief, the difficulties that families and children living with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism face in their day-to-day lives. Many of the support networks that families have previously relied on e.g. – schools, day-care centres, healthcare providers and a wide range of both formal and informal practical and emotional support systems have been difficult to access during the last 27 months. Our work before this project highlighted, that even without the added pressures of a global pandemic, support for BAME families living with neurodiversity was especially problematic, due to a lack of awareness of neurodiversity let alone support from community organisations.

For Sikh families, active engagement within the network of Gurdwaras is an important form of social, spiritual and emotional support, and through this project, we wanted to lay the groundwork for the development of community knowledge, support and understanding that would enable and encourage neurodiverse families to feel welcome, supported, and involved with the wider Gurdwara network. We also aimed to develop resources and knowledge at Gurdwara's to explore practice, culture and adaptations that enable participation, as well as the empowerment to offer emotional and practical support for early detection and support for children and young people experiencing difficulties associated with lifelong neurodiverse characteristics such as Autism.

To support this work, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) works in partnership with Caudwell Children, who have over 20 years of experience and expertise in providing support to young people and families living with a wide range of disabilities.

In order to explore the experiences and views of the community, we took a combined quantitative and qualitative approach.

In order to inform the priorities of the support group, we designed a questionnaire in consultation with Caudwell Children (**Appendix 1**) that has since been updated to reflect the growing focus of our network. Our support staff made contact with thirty-two schools in the West London region and six Sikh Faith Schools across the United Kingdom – where we directly attempted to recruit parents, young people and educationalists for consultation. We made a direct appeal to families to participate, via letter (**Appendix 2**) and social media advertisements (**Appendix 3**).



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Unfortunately, as we had expected, many families and teachers that we spoke with were unable to provide much support or information, due to the extremely challenging environment for families and educators – particularly those living or working with children or young persons with special educational needs. Consequently, we focused our attention on directly approaching Gurdwaras to participate from both a management perspective and to seek from the Sangat (congregation); families with experience of neurodiversity.

Through direct contact with families, we discovered that there was some resistance to the idea of joining our network, due to perceptions of stigmas within the community toward neurodiverse individuals. Whilst this initially acted as a barrier to participation, we are pleased to see that these difficulties have decreased significantly, as seeing other families raising and bringing the issue of neurodiversity into the mainstream conversation within the Gurdwara network, has given more parents and carers the confidence to join our network.

From the positive responses we received, we were able to form a focus group, with representatives of both families, and management committees at the following Gurdwaras, which have agreed to be the pilot organisations for our work going forwards.

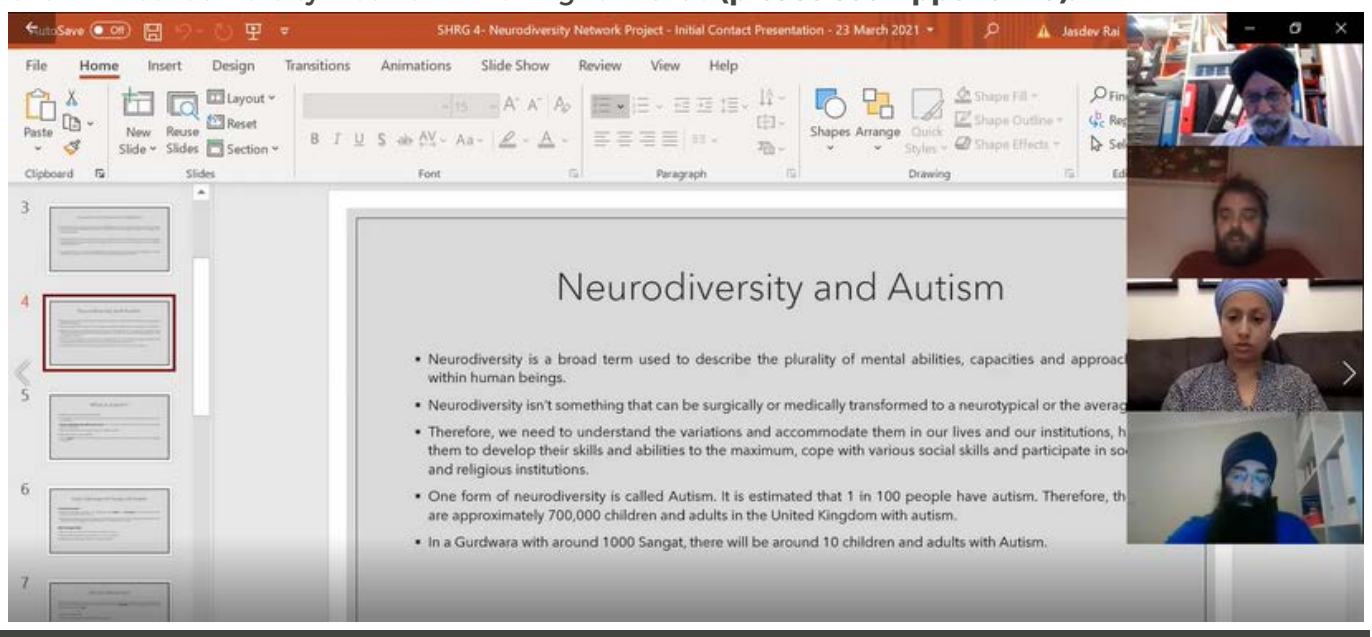
- **Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (West London)**
- **Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick (Birmingham)**
- **Nanaksar Thath Isher Darbar (Wolverhampton)**
- **Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Hounslow, Middlesex)**
- **Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (Hounslow, Middlesex)**
- **Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Watford. Hertfordshire)**



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

In the initial focus groups, which were conducted with families from these Gurdwaras, as well as experts from Caudwell Children – we explored some of the issues facing families when bringing children and young people with Autism to the Gurdwara, as well as exploring some of the cultural, organisational and spiritual aspects that affect attitudes towards members with neurodiverse needs. In these discussions, we explored some of the barriers that families may face. In order to frame the conversation around the workshop aspects of the project – we discussed terminology and the broad spectrum of difficulties that families and young people face, which are often not neatly contained within a single label. Thus, rather than focusing on ‘conditions’ we explored the need to ‘mainstream’ discussions about neurodiversity, that are traditionally hidden amongst the community, and frame this discussion using positive language. **(Please see Appendix 4 for example minutes from these focus groups).**

We also determined in these focus group sessions, that the authenticity of the work was very important – to this end, we felt it was important for the ongoing work and workshops, to be led by parents and careers who were themselves drawn from the Gurdwara Sangat – from these discussions, a member of the group volunteered to coordinate discussions with families and develop a clear statement of purpose for the ‘Sikh Neurodiversity Network’ moving forwards **(please see Appendix 5).**

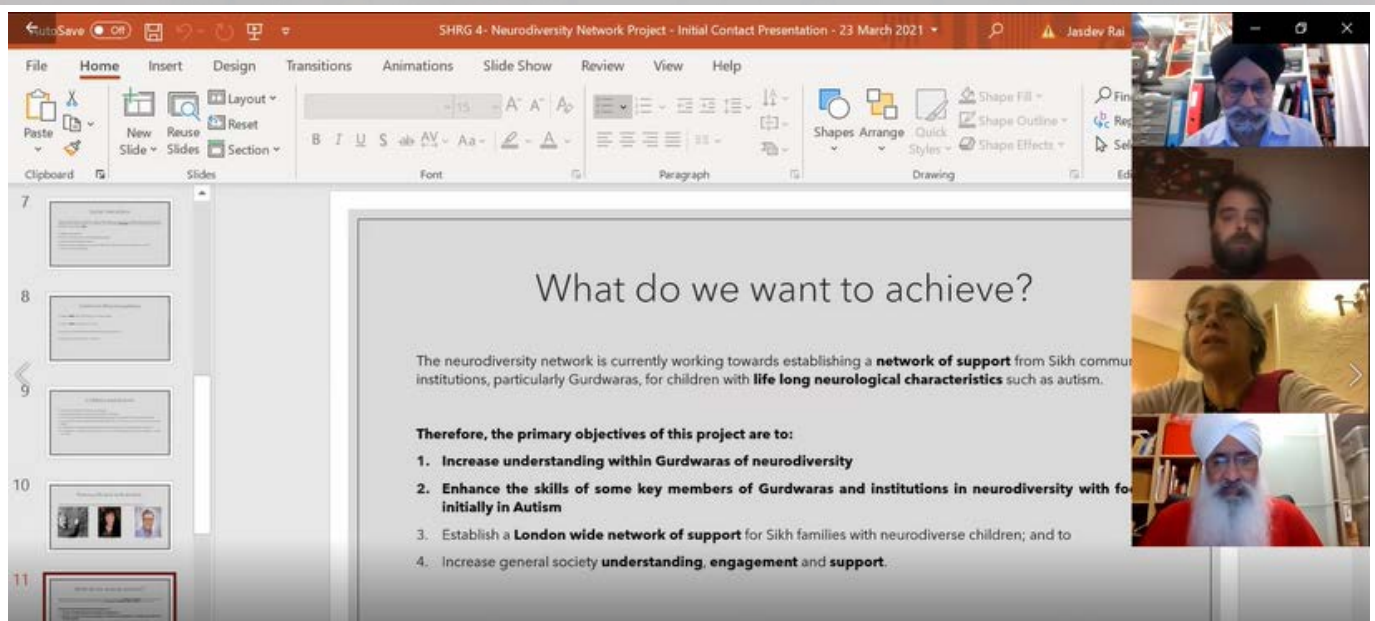


SHRG 4- Neurodiversity Network Project - Initial Contact Presentation - 23 March 2021

Neurodiversity and Autism

- Neurodiversity is a broad term used to describe the plurality of mental abilities, capacities and approaches within human beings.
- Neurodiversity isn't something that can be surgically or medically transformed to a neurotypical or the average.
- Therefore, we need to understand the variations and accommodate them in our lives and our institutions, help them to develop their skills and abilities to the maximum, cope with various social skills and participate in social and religious institutions.
- One form of neurodiversity is called Autism. It is estimated that 1 in 100 people have autism. Therefore, there are approximately 700,000 children and adults in the United Kingdom with autism.
- In a Gurdwara with around 1000 Sangat, there will be around 10 children and adults with Autism.

SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK



We then utilised the learnings from these workshops to:

- (i) Bring experts in neurodiversity together with leaders from Gurdwaras across London, and in the Midlands, with families and parents, to explore practical approaches to improving access and support for neurodiverse individuals and their families.
- (ii) Create audio-visual educational resources for use within Gurdwara leadership groups to explore and explain issues and avenues for support.
- (iii) Bring families from Sikh backgrounds closer to organisations that can offer rapid early support for children and young people in need and encourage and empower leaders within the Gurdwara network to signpost families to other organisations or community support groups.
- (iv) Develop an ongoing and sustainable leadership for the Sikh Neurodiversity Network agenda.
- (v) Offer this experience and expertise to other BAME communities across England and Wales.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

From our initial focus group work, it was clear that there was a need to educate and inform Gurdwara management and the Sangat. Due to the current environment, we were unable to meet face-to-face, but held sessions on Zoom, extending an invitation to families at each Gurdwara, and senior management representatives from the Gurdwara committees. Attendees of the workshops included Gurdwara management representatives, representatives of the SHRG, and Caudwell Children, as well as families with direct experience of bringing neurodiverse children and young people into the Gurdwara – we were able to secure the support for joining these workshops from two further experts from the community - a deputy headteacher in a special educational needs school and a speech and language therapist.

Our first two workshops were focused on:

(1) Key facts and information about Autism and neurodiversity.

Following the focus group sessions, we developed two sets of learning materials to be presented in these workshops (**Appendix 6**), which were designed to explore thoughts and facts around neurodiversity:

- (i) Simplified PowerPoint for Gurdwara representatives and parents; and a more
- (ii) Technical PowerPoint for those in Gurdwaras who want to upscale their expertise.

After the presentation work, we discussed methodologies and adaptations that we could use to open the discussion up around neurodiversity within Gurdwaras generally. For example, the allocation of sensory spaces and simple equipment such as sensory toys, ear protectors, etc... to help all young people engage in their visit to the Gurdwara.

It was also clear from these discussions that the experience of families and neurodiverse young people who experience difficulties at the Gurdwara is not universally negative – from this, we resolved to include best practices, and examples of successes in our ongoing discussions, recommendations and materials development.

SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

(2) Building a culturally appropriate discussion around neurodiversity

In our second workshop, we explored as a group some of the cultural aspects of neurodiversity. It was clear from the discussion that one of the significant barriers to building greater understanding and widening the conversation, was not a willingness to engage – we are all in agreement that as Sikhs, we aim to be as inclusive and welcoming into the Sangat and Gurdwara as possible – but that conversation is limited by a lack of appropriate language to discuss neurodiversity in Punjabi, and consequently a limited number of resources for education around neurodiversity.

At a subsequent workshop, it was also decided to create audiovisual material. Two videos with different perspectives from two parents and one video regarding the changes being introduced at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (West London). **To watch the full videos please [click here](#)**



Mr Mandip Thind
(Parent)



Ms Narender Kaur
(Parent)



Mr Harmeet Gill
(General Secretary of GSGSSS)



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Plans for 2022 and Beyond

Project Targets

- (1) Hold at least 36 SEN engagement events at religious and community institutions in England and Wales for neurodiverse children and adults and those who are close to them. The primary objective is to listen to the aforementioned parties concerns and to upskill the concerned organisation on what they could be doing to make their organisation a more welcoming and nurturing environment for neurodiverse children and adults.**
- (2) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for those in positions of authority within the religious or community institutions.**
- (3) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for the regular congregation or those that regularly visit their community institution.**
- (4) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for police officers and support staff.**
- (5) Run neurotypical and neurodiverse youth engagement events. Primarily, targeted at forging genuine and subsisting relationships between neurotypical and neurodiverse youth.**
- (6) Prepare informative pamphlets, guides, videos, etc... for parents and nonprofessional carers on but not limited to the following topics:**
 - (i) How and where to obtain a diagnosis if you suspect that your child may have a lifelong neurological characteristic such as Autism.
 - (ii) What support is available to you and your child should they be diagnosed with a lifelong neurological characteristic such as Autism.

SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

- (iii) What rights one has in regards to your child's mainstream education and general standard of living.
- (iv) Enhancing employment opportunities. Both for individuals with a lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism and employers alike.
- (v) How best to safeguard your child against negative interactions with the police. For instance, outlining the stop and search procedures, why it is important for individuals with Autism to carry Autism alert cards, what to expect upon arriving in custody, what support is available or should be available in custody and during police interviews, the best methods to communicate with your legal representatives prior to trial, the trial itself and what support is or should be available, what statutory bodies or civil society organisations can support you in any of the aforementioned matters.
- (vi) For police officers and support staff what characteristics or behaviours might be indicators that an individual has a lifelong neurological characteristic such as Autism, what communication techniques seem to work best with those with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism, the current statutory and regulatory guidelines, what support is or should be on offer to those who wish to learn more about or enhance their training in neurodiversity, what statutory bodies or civil society organisations can support them in any of the aforementioned matters.



Accept.
Understand.
Love



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Project Targets Explained

(1) Hold at least 36 SEN engagement events at religious and community institutions in England and Wales for neurodiverse children and adults and those who are close to them. The primary objective is to listen to the aforementioned parties concerns and to upskill the concerned organisation on what they could be doing to make their organisation a more welcoming and nurturing environment for neurodiverse children and adults.

- On the 18th of December 2021, we held our first SEN engagement event at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall. We sold forty-five free tickets.

There was music, arts and crafts, sensory toys, games and food and drink for the children.

There was also an extensive discussion between members of this project and the parents and carers of neurodiverse children and adults regarding what they believe the Gurdwara could be doing to make it a more welcoming and nurturing environment for neurodiverse children and adults.

The large majority of parents and carers also completed and returned our participants' questionnaire regarding the above-mentioned matters.

Since the conclusion of the event or on the 7th of January 2022 Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer and Project Coordinator at the SHRG) and Mr Harmeet Gill (General Secretary of Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall) discussed the findings of the event and agreed upon the following:

(1) To replicate our SEN engagement event for neurodiverse children and adults and those who are close to them on the 19th of February 2022 and then every month from there on if not more frequently.

(2) To run practitioner-led SEN training days for those in positions of authority within the Gurdwara starting in May 2022.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

(3) To run practitioner-led SEN training days for the Sangat (regular congregation) starting in June 2022.

(4) To run neurotypical and neurodiverse youth engagement events. Primarily, targeted at forging genuine and subsisting relationships between neurotypical and neurodiverse youth through sports, games etc... starting in September 2022.

(5) To host weekly after school drop-in sessions for neurodiverse children and young adults and those who are close to them. Starting in May 2022.

(6) To host Monday morning coffee mornings or support sessions for parents and careers. These events will be led by organisations that can offer their support to the aforementioned parties starting in June 2022.

- Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick (Birmingham) has also committed to holding SEN engagement events. These events follow the same or a very similar structure to the events that we hold at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall. We hosted our first SEN engagement event at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick on the 2nd of April 2022.
- Shri Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Swindon) have also agreed in principle to host SEN engagement events. These events will also follow the same or a similar structure to the events that we hold at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall.
- Besides the above, we are also currently working with Gurdwaras in East London, Croydon and Slough in order to arrange the establishment of combined projects. These again will follow a similar structure to the programmes outlined above.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

(2) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for those in positions of authority within the religious or community institutions.

(3) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for the regular congregation or those that regularly visit their community institution.

(4) Run practitioner-led SEN training days for police officers and support staff.

Dates: 2022 to 2023

Initial Geographical Focus: London – Greater London – Oxfordshire – Birmingham

Resources Required:

(i) The designation of an organisational representative. That will take responsibility for or be the first contact point for the coordination of our initiative.

(ii) Advertisement of the training event to the concerned parties.

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer and Project Coordinator at the SHRG) will draft both online and physical advertisements.

(iii) The use of an appropriate room for no more than 2 hours per session.

(iv) Access to and the use of a projector or whiteboard.

(v) Agreed upon strategy for data collection after the training days. In other words, a strategy concerning how we will measure the effectiveness of these training days or areas that may still need focus.

(vi) Certificates for the participants. Mr Carlos Arbuthnott will draft these in accordance with the medical professionals and the organisational representatives' wishes.



Medical Professionals:

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott will source appropriate medical experts from the Sikh Neurodiversity Networks' extensive contacts to run these events and formulate a programme of work in conjunction with them and the organisation concerned.

The medical professional will most likely possess the following working title:

- Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist

For example, most recently we welcomed Dr Pawan Rajpal (pictured above) to Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall a consultant from the Priory Hospital to speak to the staff and Sangat about neurodiversity and in particular Autism. Dr Rajpal is a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and specialises in Autism, ADHD, PTSD, addictions and complex health diagnoses.

Training Day Content:

- The events will most likely cover the following topics as well as an audience Q&A:

General

- What characteristics or behaviours might be indicators that an individual has a lifelong neurological characteristic such as Autism.
 - What communication techniques seem to work best with those with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism.
 - The current statutory and regulatory guidelines.
 - What support is or should be on offer to those who wish to learn more about or enhance their training in neurodiversity.
 - The importance of working together to eradicate the stigma of special or additional needs in our communities.
-



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Specific

- Sensory systems - overload and what this looks like, what to do if someone is having a meltdown, shutdown, etc...
- Stimming - what this looks like (hand flapping, rocking, ticks, humming and more) and the importance of not stopping it as it is a way for an Autistic person to self-regulate sensory overload or other needs. We need to normalise stimming.
- Eye contact: this can be incredibly difficult for Autistic people to try and maintain - some can find it painful and overwhelming. Pressure should not be put on autistic individuals to 'look in the eye' etc... For example, this can be an issue in schools where educators don't understand this (ironically, our culture is such that prolonged eye contact can also be seen as rude).

(5) Run neurotypical and neurodiverse youth engagement events. Primarily, targeted at forging genuine and subsisting relationships between neurotypical and neurodiverse youth.

The type and form of these engagement events will depend primarily upon what is already being offered by the religious or community institution in question. In other words, we hope to build upon existing youth clubs or sports club activities in order to make them more engaging and more inclusive towards those with lifelong neurological characteristics.

If however, the religious or community institution does not provide these services already then we would seek to establish either a general youth club or sports club for both neurotypical and neurodiverse youth. The societal effect or need for this should be obvious to the religious or community institutions' decision-makers. However, if it is not then it can very easily be explained.

Unfortunately, it is too early for us to say precisely what resources will be required. However, we will be trialling this limb of the project at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall over the coming months.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

(6) Prepare informative pamphlets, guides, videos, etc... for parents and nonprofessional carers on but not limited to the following topics:

SHRGs website has recently undergone reconstruction. Consequently, our brand new website now includes a Sikh Neurodiversity Network page that we hope will serve as the focal point for any information arising out of or formulated by the Sikh Neurodiversity Network. In other words, we hope that not only will it include informative pamphlets, guides, videos, etc... for parents and nonprofessional carers but also:


- Links to helpful Governmental and Non-Governmental websites.
- Links to charities that operate within the parents' or nonprofessional carers' local areas and that may be of assistance to them alongside a map outlining their geographical position that you can filter by the charities' areas of expertise or the topic that you are searching.
- The contact details of legal professionals or other professionals who may be able to help them assert their and their child's statutory rights, etc...

To visit our brand new Sikh Neurodiversity Network website page please [click here](#)

For more information please contact:

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott
Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator
London Office
Email: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo



A woman with her face and body painted in vibrant colors like pink, yellow, and blue. She has a bindi on her forehead and is wearing a large, ornate earring. Her right hand is raised, with her palm facing forward. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) started its Menstrual Empowerment Project when our Human Rights Officers noted the global ignorance surrounding menstrual education, access, and taboos. Since founding this project we have uncovered the persistent injustice people who menstruate suffer every day from the gendered-based tax discrimination of the products they require to have a healthy and dignified cycle to the education of menstruation that encourages child marriage.

The lack of free or affordable access to menstrual products in parts of the globe has led young girls to sell their bodies for sex to pay for menstrual products. The poor, insufficient, or non-existent education on menstruation has meant that in parts of the world when young people start menstruating, they are seen to be eligible for marriage and consequently this misinformation has directly led to girls as young as 12 having sex with much older men. Furthermore, the taboo associated with menstruation has led to many young girls committing suicide when they have bled through their school clothes.

However, our Human Rights Officers have noticed that there are many parts of the United Nations Declaration and Conventions that exist to protect people who menstruate from the aforementioned issues and challenges. Therefore, we have been and will continue to use our Special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council to call for action. For instance, we will continue to:

- Work with the United Nations in order to put political pressure on Member States to remove the tampon tax, as we believe that it is a prime example of gendered-based discrimination. To achieve this we have submitted numerous written and oral statements at various UN conferences and events. That in turn has directly led to the UN Human Rights Council requesting that we create a step-by-step plan or guide on how to eliminate the tampon tax globally with particular attention being paid to how Member States can overcome the many challenges and issues that the 20+ countries who have already eliminated the tampon tax faced whilst doing so.
- Request that the UN Women establish a department or a global governing body whose purpose is to set out a basic curriculum on how to educate on menstruation. This is a guiding instrument that all Member States can contribute to and adopt or deliver in whatever manner suits their historical or cultural influences best.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS STANCE ON THE ISSUE

In 2021 our Human Rights, Communications and Media Officer, Ms Bethan Walters, founded SHRG's Menstrual Empowerment Project which has directly led to a network of 96 organisations from 5 different continents sharing their research, resources, experience, and voices to help remove menstrual stigma, improve education, and make the option of sustainable menstruation products more accessible for all people who menstruate.

On a national level, the SHRG has been hosting monthly webinars with academics and experts to discuss the different stages of menstruation and reproductive health by breaking the taboo and the bias on what we discuss and what we demand to have respect for. We have also been working with Binti Period and their Dignity at Work Scheme in order to encourage schools, universities, workplaces, places of worship and public bathrooms in general to provide free menstrual products. However, it is extremely important to note that we only request this if the organisation or business concerned can ensure that the products made available are sustainable.

On an international scale and as previously mentioned, we are calling for the United Nations to put political pressure on Member States to remove the tampon tax as it is a form of gender-based discrimination and to ensure that all menstrual products fall under its ban, not just the disposable ones. Within this plea, we are also preparing a step-by-step plan or guide on how to eliminate the tampon tax globally with particular attention being paid to how Member States can overcome the many challenges and issues that the 20+ countries who have already eliminated the tampon tax faced whilst doing so.

We are also pushing for the UN Women to draft a basic curriculum for all Member States to teach children from as young as 7 about menstrual health and to create a network of organisations globally to share their research and help shape attitudes towards menstruation and fundamentally reproductive health and ensure that the language lost around menstruation due to the use of codewords is regained.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

UN ENGAGEMENT

Since founding SHRGs Menstrual Empowerment Project in 2021 our Human Rights, Communications and Media Officer, Ms Bethan Walters, has hosted a virtual panel event at the NGO Commission on the Status of Women Sixty-Sixth Session (CSW66) in March 2022. Ms Walters also submitted two oral interventions at the 49th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. One at the Annual Debate on the Rights of the Child and the other under Item 8 (General Debate) regarding the follow up to the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, to which we also submitted a written statement.

SHRGs CSW66 Event

Our CSW66 event was entitled **‘Allowing Women (and people who menstruate) to be Environmentally Mindful Throughout the Whole Month’**. The event covered a range of issues and obstacles that have been put in place to prevent people who menstruate from making more sustainable choices. Our panel of experts was made up of:

- Ms Manjit K Gill MBE; CEO of Binti Period, Period Advisor to the UK Government, currently working in the UK, India, and the Gambia.
- Ms Ella Daish; UK Environmental Activist, founder of the #EndPeriodPlastic campaign, awarded the Climate Coalitions Green Heart Hero 2020 Award for Individual Inspiration, included on The Big Issue's Top 100 Changemakers of 2020, and BBC Woman's Hour Power List.
- Ms Megan White Mukuria; Founder of Zana Africa (Kenya) working on equipping adolescent girls in East Africa, specifically Kenya, with the tools that they need to safely navigate puberty and unlock their potential.
- The CEO of TOTM (Time Of The Month), a leading sustainable period product company, Ms Sally Tuhami - provided a business/ economic perspective on the tampon tax, its impacts on sustainable period products, and the steps that need to be taken to get rid of it globally.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

From these experts, we highlighted the common expectation from countries with higher GDP, which tend to be in the northern hemisphere, to set a precedent. This will encourage all other countries to be making similar policy changes in regards to sustainability. We discussed the economics of sustainable menstrual products and provided insights into the challenges that often make it a lot more expensive to produce, sell and purchase sustainable menstrual products. Further, there was a consensus that removing the tampon tax is not enough to make menstruation more affordable.

There was also a critical explanation of the title of our event. It was stressed that this was not a call for all people who menstruate to be held accountable and to make more environmentally conscious choices but rather sought to look at the challenges and obstacles that prevent people who menstruate from having that choice in the first place.

The challenges facing menstruating people can be due to the lack of bathrooms and privacy, lack of access to clean and safe water, lack of access to the necessary equipment to dispose of menstrual products safely and with dignity, due to the cost of the products themselves, lack of education on menstruation and menstrual products, or the stigma associated with menstruation.

Many of these challenges and obstacles have been put in place, often unconsciously, by men in leadership positions. However, we submit that it might also be a lack of representation in Governmental establishments that might be a contributing factor to this big problem.

We also reiterated how one size doesn't fit all when it comes to menstrual management and whilst 50% of the population may menstruate, each person's experience is extremely different, and therefore it is important to adopt this pluralistic mindset in pursuing change.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

SHRGs WRITTEN STATEMENTS TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The SHRG submitted written statements for circulation amongst Member State delegates, UN staff and NGOs on but not limited to Item 8 (General Debate) of the UN HRC's 49th Regular Session. The statements commended the fact that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action have led to a considerable amount of invaluable human rights achievements over the past 29 years.

In pursuit of gender equality and dignity and respect for women, the SHRG is working with over 20 organisations and activists worldwide, along with fellow ECOSOC NGO, the Centre for Public Health in Nigeria, to highlight areas of implementation of the Vienna Declaration which will improve education, access and the steps towards the elimination of the stigma surrounding menstruation. Successful examples were cited.

Next year the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action will celebrate its 30th birthday. Only 21 countries have zero-rate tax or a tax exemption on the sale of menstrual products. It is important to add that even in many of these countries this does not include all menstrual products, particularly sustainable or re-usable products, for instance, the sale of 'period panties' in the United Kingdom.

Education on menstruation is less than adequate to non-existent, in many parts of the globe, including both the northern and southern hemispheres. Many countries teach menstrual health as part of reproductive health rather than as a stand-alone topic. While menstrual education straddles reproductive education, parents, teachers and even Governments are opting out of this part of the curriculum as they do not feel comfortable teaching reproductive education to their children.

Therefore, the SHRG feels that in reference to gender and women's dignity, the Vienna Declaration can be implemented more effectively with a particular focus on the elimination of the tampon tax globally and the need for a global advisory body within the UN Women to set a basic curriculum for menstrual education in accordance with cultural nuances.



Whilst the SHRG and other like-minded organisations and agencies feel that WASH and Menstrual Hygiene Day are undertaking invaluable work, especially, providing access to facilities that allow women to stay safe and hygienic when they menstruate, there also needs to be a more aggressive push for sufficient, helpful and informative education on menstruation. We need a global advisory body to set a basic curriculum to cover menstruation.

The World Bank recently stated that:

'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 these issues exist because menstruation is still a taboo topic in many parts of the world. We are losing the traditional and informative language of mensuration as many people resort to adopting 'code words'. For instance, using the word hygiene when it comes to menstrual education, in general, makes women feel dirty and ashamed of one of their most natural bodily functions.

Why removal of the Tampon Tax would be an example of implementing the Vienna Declaration

The tampon tax is a human rights issue because menstruation and affordable access to menstrual products is inextricably linked to our human rights to health, sanitation, education, dignity, and work amongst various other basic human rights. Therefore, eliminating taxes on menstrual products, both sustainable and disposable, is consistent with the human right to be free from discrimination along with various other additional rights that are enshrined within the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1993.

Specifically, Section 3, para 39 [WCHR], on the equal status and human rights of women:

'Urges the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, both hidden and overt'.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

It is SHRG's contention that women's human rights are breached when menstrual hygiene products are subject to sales tax. There are no similar products that men must use because of an involuntary, biological monthly occurrence. The closest analogous products used primarily by men are not subject to the same or similar taxation. Taxing products used primarily, or even exclusively, by women is to tax them based on their gender. This goes against well established international human rights norms. Hence the removal of taxation on all menstrual products is essential and consistent with the implementation of the Vienna Declaration.

Why introducing an advisory body to set a basic curriculum on menstrual health would further the implementation of the Vienna Declaration

Section 3, para 41 of the Vienna Declaration [WCHR]:

'Recognises the importance of the enjoyment by women of the highest standard of physical and mental health throughout their life span. In the context of the World Conference on Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Proclamation of Tehran of 1968, the World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms, on the basis of equality between women and men, a woman's right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning services, as well as equal access to education at all levels...'

The SHRG along with many other NGOs, organisations, individuals, and young people who menstruate, believe that this is something that is not being implemented on a global scale as in many countries educators still refuse to teach menstruation as a stand-alone topic because they do not understand it or because of their own trauma. Due to the lack of education around this topic, we are losing the appropriate language that puts this natural phenomenon into context. For example, it has been found by Binti Period when working with 100 teachers in the Gambia, that none of them knew the correct terminology to use due to menstruation being such a taboo topic. The educators only seem to know the 'code words'. Due to these taboos around menstruation, we are losing vital language and fewer and fewer people who menstruate are being taught about it.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

We believe that a way of implementing these provisions of the Vienna Declaration more effectively would be to introduce a Global Advisory Body that advises on a basic curriculum on menstruation. That in turn would allow the United Nations to encourage Member States who signed up to the Vienna Declaration to enact it into their national education systems.

This would include organisations across the globe working together to ensure that the information included within the curriculum is appropriate and palatable for all and in keeping with the SHRG's push for a pluralistic approach to institutional leadership and engagement.

Specifically, Section D81:

'[...] recommends that States develop specific programmes and strategies for ensuring the widest human rights education and the dissemination of public information, taking particular account of the human rights needs of women'.

This provision perfectly addresses the need for a more authoritative body to devise a basic curriculum on menstrual education. If the United Nations adopted this suggestion, it would be a way of fulfilling a significant commitment made in the Vienna Declaration. We believe if this existed it would stop girls, like the 14-year-old schoolgirl in Kenya in 2019, who took her own life after a teacher allegedly embarrassed her for having her period in class.

Report

The SHRG is currently working on a report that outlines our international agenda regarding menstrual empowerment. For instance, it will showcase the issues that at least 20 countries globally face regarding menstruation access, education, and stigma. Some of the countries included are but are not limited to Kenya, Nigeria, India, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, the Gambia, Malawi, Thailand, Nepal, and Colombia.



Global Events

The SHRG is also helping to organise a conference in Malawi to celebrate its recent elimination of the Tampon Tax. The intention behind this event is for the leading charity in Malawi on menstruation, ANPPCAN Malawi Chapter, to work with the Malawi President, Mr Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera, who is also the Chairman of the Southern African Development Committee to help encourage neighbouring countries to eliminate the Tampon Tax.

On the 28th of May 2022 for Menstrual Hygiene Day, we are hosting a webinar with the Centre of Public Health in Nigeria which also has UN ECOSOC Status.

On the 8th of December 2022 or on Dignified Menstruation Day we intend on working with several organisations globally to raise awareness.

Plans for 2022 and Beyond

The SHRG plans to grow our network so that we have representatives from nearly every country around the globe. We want to showcase the need and effectiveness of having a body that works on all the issues that exist for people who menstruate. We will also continue to run individual and collaborative projects in order to achieve our aforementioned objectives.

For more information please contact:

Ms Bethan Walters
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NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

With the significant and recent advancements in modern technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and other information and communication technologies, the methods via which human beings relate, work, and communicate are inevitably been altered. However, the presence of these new technologies means that the new and established means by which we reach the full enjoyment of our human rights are being jeopardised. This is why, by defending the whole person, the right to privacy enables individuals to fully exercise and enjoy other human rights such as the free expression of their personality, their identity, their individual beliefs, as well as the ability to participate freely in political, economic, social and cultural life.

Therefore, it also seems necessary that the right to privacy be interpreted more broadly to highlight its enabling and positive aspects in relation to other human rights.

The improper protection of people's privacy can manifest itself in different ways, such as the inappropriate collection of personal data or the improper use of personal data. Consequently, the Sikh Human Rights Group's (SHRG's) actions to protect the right to privacy focus on two aspects:

- (1) First, we advocate for binding international regulation that guarantees individuals the ownership of their personal data. Therefore, it cannot be sold or processed by third parties without proper consent.
- (2) Secondly, we aim to raise communities' awareness of how improper processing of their personal data can jeopardise their enjoyment of other fundamental human rights, such as the right to be free from discrimination and the right to freedom of expression and religion.

Raising people's awareness has a twofold objective:

In the short term, this would allow individuals to be more aware of what may happen when their personal data is collected and to act accordingly (e.g. by rejecting unnecessary cookies, etc...).

In the long term, it will create greater awareness at a societal level of the danger of insufficient legislation and thus find more support among the population. That in turn will allow us to lobby and push for a more enhanced legal framework.



NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

SHRGs STANCE ON THE ISSUE AND OUR LONGITUDINAL OBJECTIVES

Since establishing our programme on the impact of new technologies on the enjoyment of human rights in 2021, the SHRG has been cultivating and developing connections with other NGOs and delegations from UN Member States that share our views on this issue. These connections are being forged with a view to the UN Member States enacting or adopting cutting-edge legislation regarding the protection of our personal data. This will allow us to share resources and expertise to strengthen and continue our fight for the respect of the right to privacy.

Furthermore and as previously mentioned, the dissatisfaction with the right to privacy impacts the full enjoyment of many other fundamental rights, so for our work in this area, we collaborate with actors not only focused on new technologies but also with groups such as journalists and political activists and religious associations.

This multidisciplinary approach allows us to use the formal mechanisms and processes of the United Nations, such as the oral and written statements mechanisms of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the suggestions processes in the Universal Periodic Review, to promote binding legislation that grants ownership of personal data to the individuals to whom it belongs.

We also intend to create an awareness programme on the importance of protecting our personal data for Swiss schoolchildren and thus start to raise further awareness in Europe.

The background of the top section is a photograph of the United Nations flag, which is light blue with a white emblem in the center, waving against a clear blue sky.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

UN ENGAGEMENT

In 2021 we drafted two written statements regarding the right to privacy. In the first, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council at their 47th Regular Session, we reiterated the importance of protecting the human rights of individuals in the virtual world as well as the need to ensure that whenever Artificial Intelligence is used for decision-making, the last word or decision is always left to a human.

To read our full report entitled A/HRC/47/NGO/177 please [click here](#)

In addition to the above, we also participated in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy, thanks to which we were able to once again reiterate the importance of raising awareness about the dangers of the indiscriminate collection of personal data of young people, one of the groups that arguably makes the most use of new information and communication technologies.

In the following written statement, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council during their 49th Regular Session, we congratulated the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its recent adoption of ethical recommendations for the use of Artificial Intelligence. However, we underlined the need for these set of recommendations to move from being mere recommendations or guidelines to being legally binding in order to be truly useful.

To read our full report entitled A/HRC/49/NGO/153 please [click here](#)

Furthermore, in an oral statement also delivered at the 49th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we endorsed the work being undertaken in Latin America on the implementation of effective legislation on the protection of personal data and encouraged the UN Member States in that region to share their good practices and to make further progress in this area.

To watch the full video please [click here](#) (Spanish)

To read the full oral statement please [click here](#) (English)



NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The SHRC intends to continue expanding upon its network of contacts with like-minded organisations and agencies to show decision-makers that civil society is demanding progress on this issue and to create a crash course to raise awareness amongst our global society about the dangers of the indiscriminate collection and use of our personal data.

For more information please contact:

Mr Ivan Lorenci De Francisco
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Email: ivan.lorenci@shrg.ngo

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY DEVELOPED TO EXPLORE OPINIONS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Questions about you and your child

All answers given will be kept highly confidential and will not be shared with any external bodies to the Sikh Human Rights Group unless you provide us with your express written permission

Question 1: My child is...

0-4 years
5-11 years
12-16 years
17-18 years

Question 2: My child is...

male
female
prefer not to say

Question 3: My child attends a...

mainstream school or nursery/preschool/early years setting
special educational needs school
college
is in employment or supported work
training/further education/adult education
Other e.g. independent sector, home schooling (please specify in the text box below)

Question 4: What is your current place of worship called?

(participants were also given the option not to specify)

Question 5: Are you a representative of your religious institution?

Yes, I am a part of the team leaders
I serve on the council or I am a trustee
I preach but don't have leadership responsibilities
No, I am not a recognized leader
Prefer not to say

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY DEVELOPED TO EXPLORE OPINIONS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Question 6: How many times do you attend religious services or ceremonies at your place of worship?

Never
Less than once a year
Once or twice a year
Several times a year
Once a month
2-3 times a month
About once a week
Several times a week

Question 7: How long has it been since you first started visiting your current place of worship?

1 year or less
2-4 years
5-9 years
10-19 years
20 or more years

Question 8: If your child has attended your place of worship in the last two years, please tell us how satisfied you were with the support that you received in regards to your child's attendance?

Very Unsatisfied
Unsatisfied
No Opinion/ Don't Know
Satisfied
Very Satisfied
N/A

*If you wish to make any comments relating to your answers given in Question 8 please use the box below.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY DEVELOPED TO EXPLORE OPINIONS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Question 9: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

'I know whom to contact at my place of worship if I have any questions or problems relating to my child's attendance'

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

No Opinion/ Don't Know

Agree

Strongly Agree

N/A

Question 10: How confident are you in your religious institutions' ability to deal with individuals with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism?

Not at all

Not very

No Opinion / Don't know

Quite

Very

*If you wish to make any comments relating to your answer given in Question 10 please use the box below.

Question 11: Do you think that your religious leaders and those responsible for the management of your religious institution would benefit from training in Autism awareness and understanding?

Yes

No

It depends (please use the text box below)

*If you wish to make any comments relating to your answers given in Question 11 please use the box below.

Question 12: Please give us an example of what has worked well to support your child?

Question 13: If there's one small thing that would make a big difference to you or your child please describe it here:

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY DEVELOPED TO EXPLORE OPINIONS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Question 14: Please use the text box below to make any other comments or suggestions that you may have to increase your religious institutions' understanding, engagement and support for individuals who have Autism or maybe on the Autistic spectrum?

Particularly, in regards to the establishment of volunteers within your religious institutions to intervene in times of difficulty or to ensure that there is sensitivity around the issue?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Your answers will be treated with the highest degree of confidentiality

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO FAMILIES AND PARENTS



SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP
NGO with special consultative status at UN ECOSOC
E-mail: admin@shrg.net web site: www.shrg.net
89 South Rd, Southall, UNITED KINGDOM, UB1 1SQ

NETWORKING FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING IN SIKH INSTITUTIONS

Dear Parents,

Not all children are the same. Not all children behave the same. And not all children think the same. Waheguru has created diversity and differences making this world richer, more variable and more creative.

Often society tends to seek conformity. But with so much natural diversity this ends up in misunderstandings between those who want conformity and seek to change those who are different. And when they can't they sometimes end up marginalizing individuals who are different. With a little bit of understanding, these tensions can go away and society, communities and groups can function extremely well as a supportive and cohesive community.

Some of the differences in human beings are physical differences and some mental differences. They have often been labelled as 'disabilities'. They are only disabilities because the differences are judged against a perceived 'norm'. Yet they may be just nature's variations.

One of the differences that is often misunderstood but understood by experts is 'Autism'. Children with Autism do not have physical differences. They just think and associate differently with others.

Unfortunately, many community organisations are unaware of this. They think the child is being rude, not paying attention, does not understand etc... Often frustration grows in both the child and those responsible for community institutions.

We want to set up a network of parents and children. Children who have Autism or maybe on the Autism spectrum. We then wish to listen to their experiences and/or the problems they have in regards to accessing Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions. We want to hear whether they feel that Sikh institutions understand Autism at all.

Then we wish to set up a network of experts within Gurdwaras who will be willing to increase their awareness of Autism. We hope that these individuals will advise committees and Gurdwara volunteers about the different forms of emotional and related communications that work better with children with Autism.

APPENDIX 2: LETTER TO FAMILIES AND PARENTS



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E-mail: admin@shrg.net web site: www.shrg.net
89 South Rd, Southall, UNITED KINGDOM, UB1 1SQ

NETWORKING FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING IN SIKH INSTITUTIONS

We will bring in an affiliate of the Sikh Human Rights Group, called Caudwell Children. They are a world-leading disability charity with considerable expertise in working with children with Autism. Their website is: www.caudwellchildren.com

We wish to hear from parents who have children with Autism. We will call a Zoom network meeting with members of some Gurdwaras and with a representative from Caudwell Children. We would then progress from there.

If you would like to be part of this network that **will change attitudes** please contact:

XXX XXX at XXX XXX

and/or

XXX XXX at XXX XXX

Yours sincerely,
Dr Jasdev Singh Rai

Sikh Human Rights Group

Website: www.shrg.net

Twitter: @S_H_R_G

Instagram: shrg_net



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

According to GurSikhi: Every life is an expression of Waheguru, in a diversity of forms, abilities, temperaments and characters.

Neurodiversity is another manifestation of mental pluralism in human life.

Not all children are the same. Not all children behave in the same way. And not all children have the same mental approach to life, education, learning skills and to social interactions. However, society often seeks uniformity and in some instances demands conformity. However, with so much neurodiversity within our general society this inevitably results in misunderstandings, tensions and sometimes sadness when those who want conformity seek to change those who may be perceived as 'different'. This in turn further marginalises those who may not be perceived as 'neurotypical'. Nevertheless, with a little bit of understanding these tensions can easily be overcome and society, groups and people can function extremely well as supportive and cohesive communities.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network is currently working towards establishing a **network of support** from Sikh community institutions, particularly Gurdwaras, for children with **lifelong neurological characteristics** such as Autism.

Therefore, the primary objectives of this project are to:

- **Increase understanding within Gurdwaras of neurodiversity.**
- **Enhance the skills of some key members of Gurdwaras and Sikh community institutions in neurodiversity** with the focus initially on Autism.
- Establish a **London wide, and later a nationwide, network of support** for Sikh families with neurodiverse children.
- Increase general society **understanding, engagement and support.**

GURDWARAS AND SIKH COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

All Sikhs and many non-Sikhs seek closeness with 'Waheguru' from the teachings and guidance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib through the GuruDawara, the open doors that the Sikh Gurus provide to people of all backgrounds, beliefs and abilities.

The greatest 'Sewa' of those serving the Guru in Gurdwaras is to ensure that the doors of the Guru are always open, welcoming and accommodating for all people irrespective of their abilities and capacities so that they feel embraced by the Guru. Therefore, it is important that no one feels marginalised or excluded simply because they 'think' differently or behave differently or prefer silence or feel uncomfortable with 'strangers'.

In our collective experience, Sikh religious and community leaders have **consistently demonstrated** vast amounts of empathy and sympathy towards those from diverse backgrounds including neurodiversity.

However, Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions often lack the formal infrastructures (systems and policies) necessary to support those with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism. However, this issue is prevalent across society or is by no means solely applicable to Gurdwaras and other Sikh institutions.

There is also **currently** very little general society awareness of the issues surrounding neurological conditions such as Autism let alone support from community based projects and organisations - **We aim to and will change this!**

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES?

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network is currently establishing a **network of support** for those with life long neurological characteristics, such as Autism, and **listening to their experiences** and the **experiences of those who are close to 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 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.

These individuals will then go on to **advise the Sangat** and **Gurdwara volunteers** about the different forms of emotional and related communications that seem to work better with neurodiverse children.

The **Sikh Human Rights Group** (an NGO with Special Consultative Status at the United Nations) will also bring in an affiliate of theirs - **Caudwell Children**. Caudwell Children are a **world leading charity** with considerable expertise in working with children and adults with lifelong neurodiversity characteristics. Please search the following link for more information about them and their vastly beneficial work: www.caudwellchildren.com

WHO CAN GET INVOLVED?

Parents: We are calling upon parents of those with lifelong neurological characteristics who are currently living in London, Greater London or in the midlands to come forward and join our network.

We want to help you feel confident and supported. Especially, when it comes to asking Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions for assistance!

Gurdwaras: We are calling upon anyone who regularly visits their local Gurdwara and who has a desire to make their Gurdwara a more meaningful and pleasant place for those with lifelong neurodiversity characteristics to come forward and join our support network!

Schools: We are calling upon representatives of schools located in London, Greater London or in the Midlands to come forward and help us, Gurdwara volunteers and Gurdwara leaders make this world a more meaningful and pleasant place for those with life long neurodiversity characteristics!

To get involved please email: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism affects how people communicate and interact with the world. For example, Autistic people may:

- Find it hard to communicate and interact with other people;
- Find it hard to understand how other people think or feel;
- Find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable;
- Get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events;
- Take longer to understand information; and
- Do or think the same things over and over.

1 in 100 people are on the Autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 Autistic adults and children in the UK.

Therefore, in a Gurdwara with around 1000 Sangat, there will be around 10 children and adults with Autism.

AUTISM IS NOT AN ILLNESS

Being Autistic does not mean you have an illness or disease. It means your brain works in a different way from other people.

It's something you're born with or first appears when you're very young.

If you're Autistic, you're Autistic your whole life.

Autism is not a medical condition with treatments or a 'cure'. However, some people do need some support to help them with certain things.

AUTISTIC PEOPLE LIVE A FULL LIFE

Like everyone, Autistic people have things that they're good at as well as things that they struggle with.

Being Autistic does not mean that you can never make friends, have relationships or hold down a job. Autistic people might just need a little extra help with these things.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

AUTISM IS DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE

Autism is a spectrum. This means everybody with Autism is different.

For instance, some Autistic people need little or no support. Whilst others may need help from a parent or a carer every day.

There are also many names for Autism, such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) – the medical name for autism;
- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) – used instead of ASD by some people; and/or
- Asperger's (or Asperger syndrome) – used by some people to describe Autistic people with average or above average intelligence.

However, Autistic people can have any level of intelligence. For instance, some Autistic people have extremely high IQ's. Whilst others may have additional learning disabilities. This means that they may find it hard to look after themselves and/or need a little extra help with their daily lives.

IT'S NOT CLEAR WHAT CAUSES AUTISM

Nobody knows what causes Autism, or if it even has a cause.

However, Autism is NOT caused by:

- Bad parenting;
- vaccines, such as the MMR vaccine;
- Diet; or
- an infection you can spread to other people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT

www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/

www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism

USEFUL CONTACTS

- Caudwell Children (Autism charity):
www.caudwellchildren.com
- The Sikh Human Rights Group:
www.shrg.net
- The National Autistic Society:
www.autism.org.uk

Email: admin@shrg.net

SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Sikh Human Rights Group
NGO with Special Consultative Status at the United Nations

PROJECT:

CREATE A NETWORK FOR NEURODIVERSITY

1. Network among parents;
2. Awareness raising within Gurdwaras and other Sikh institutions;
3. Let Schools and other institutions know of the network;
4. Practical steps in Gurdwaras and Sikh institutions; and
5. Support network and advice.

Network to include:

Parents and Children;
Gurdwara Representatives;
Experts and Teachers; and
Support personnel.

ISSUES DISCUSSED

- In many instances Gurdwaras can be extremely positive and enabling environments for children with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism. For instance, we heard from one parent who stated that the routines and structures in place at their Gurdwara had been very useful and liked by their child. For instance, the routine of taking their shoes off; covering their head; bowing; taking parshad; being able to sit down or to leave the premises whenever they liked; listening to music; eating and having access to toilets overall made Gurdwaras an easier place to visit than other religious and/or community institutions.
- However, in other instances there is a tendency amongst Gurdwara leaders (Granthis) and members of the sangat to accuse the parents of not bringing their child up properly. For instance, we heard from a parent that they have often been told to *'teach their child manners'*.
- Furthermore, we heard from a Gurdwara representative that in his experience it is quite common for a child with Autism to be accused of being possessed by an *'evil spirit'* by members of the sangat. Which leaves the parents feeling unwelcome at the Gurdwara and resorting to seeking help from *'so called holy people'* to rid their child of the *'evil spirit'*. In other words, there is a generational divide within the sangat when it comes to awareness of lifelong neurological characteristics. However, it is important to note that a parent disagreed with the above and stated that in their experience of caring for a child with severe autism who is now an adult they had not experienced this.
- A lot of the terminology commonly associated with neurological characteristics such as Autism is new as a result of recent advancements in western medicine. However, this has resulted in a disjunction between modern Indian society and traditional Indian society.



ISSUES DISCUSSED

- Many Gurdwaras have policies and systems in place to accommodate individuals with lifelong physical disabilities. Therefore, it is now time for Gurdwara committee members to turn their attention to making Gurdwaras enabling environments for those with lifelong neurological characteristics.
- We heard from a parent that when their child was diagnosed with Autism their school stopped blaming them for their child's behaviour. Therefore, a diagnoses can be helpful to dispel peoples misconceptions.
- Educational health care plans are extremely important. Not only because they are legally enforceable but also owing to the fact that whoever is named on the plan then becomes legally responsible to ensure that the requisite support is in place for the child.
- There is currently a lack of supportive literature available to parents, Granthis and the sangat **within** Gurdwaras. However, books such as *'the girl with the curly hair'* and/or *'asperges syndrome 8 to 11 year olds'* can be easily purchased and translated for wider dissemination within the sangat. For instance, translating the aforementioned literature may be particularly helpful when it comes to explaining the characteristics and needs most commonly associated with high functioning neurodiverse children to older family members.
- We heard from a Gurdwara representative that there is a tendency amongst Gurdwara committee members to simply undertake tick box exercises when it comes to those with physical disabilities and that neurological characteristics such as Autism have never been raised on the committees agenda.

HOW TO HELP

Nevertheless, in order to redress the above it was discussed and agreed that as an organisation we would:

- Train and educate volunteers to increase their awareness. These volunteers would then go on to liaise with Gurdwara committee members to inform them of the behavioural traits most commonly associated with lifelong neurological characteristics. In other words, to inform Granthis that the neurodiverse child is absolutely fine and in many instances was acting outwardly as they were having a positive sensory experience. One method via which the volunteers could be trained would be for members of our organisation to share leaflets and posters with the volunteers regarding the behavioural traits most commonly associated with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism and the most effective methods via which they and the sangat can offer their support.
 - We heard from a parent that there is a clear need for there to be a formal structure in place at Gurdwaras. For instance, we heard that knowing who to speak to (i.e. the Granthi or someone in the management committee) and having a designated area in the library or langar hall where parents who need help could go would make a world of difference to them.
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APPENDIX 5: NETWORK VISION STATEMENT

Our Mission

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network brings together parents, professionals, communities and Gurdwaras to engage, educate, support and influence acceptance.

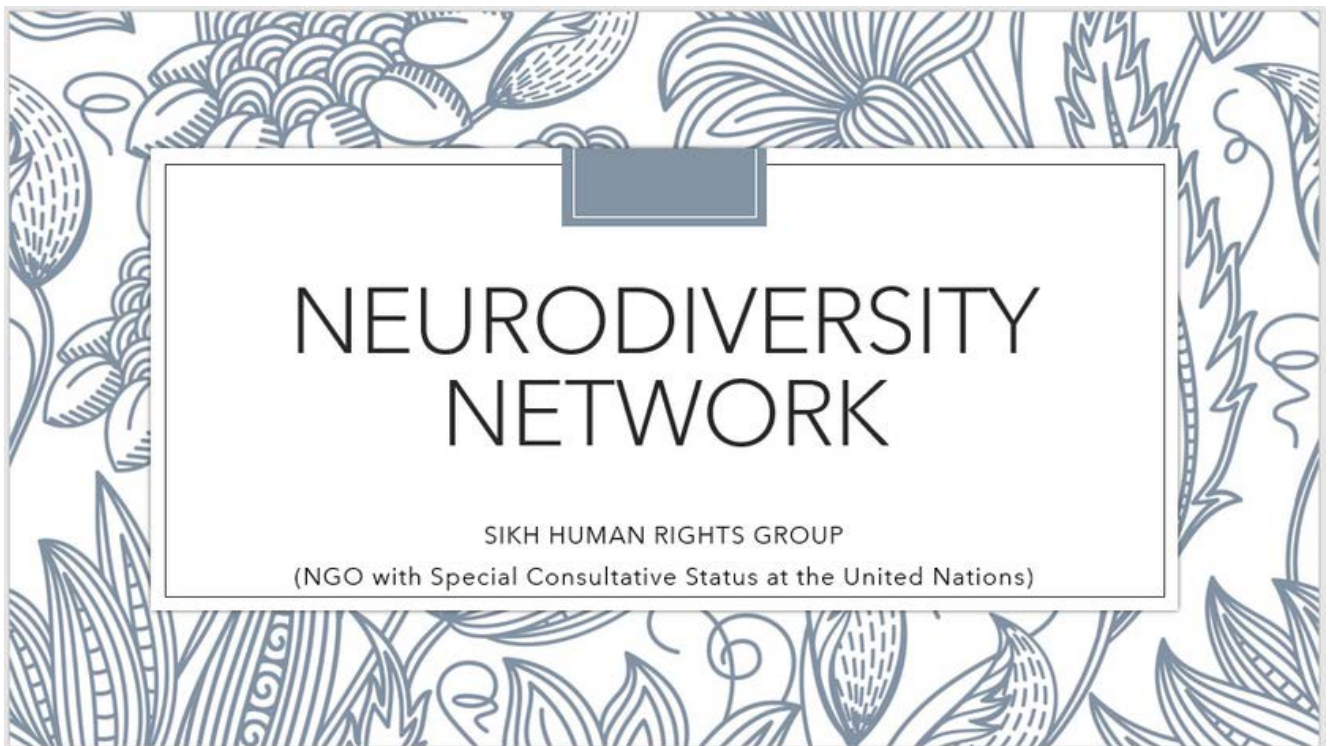
Our Vision

A world where individuals with lifelong neurological characteristics are understood and included as valued members of their communities.

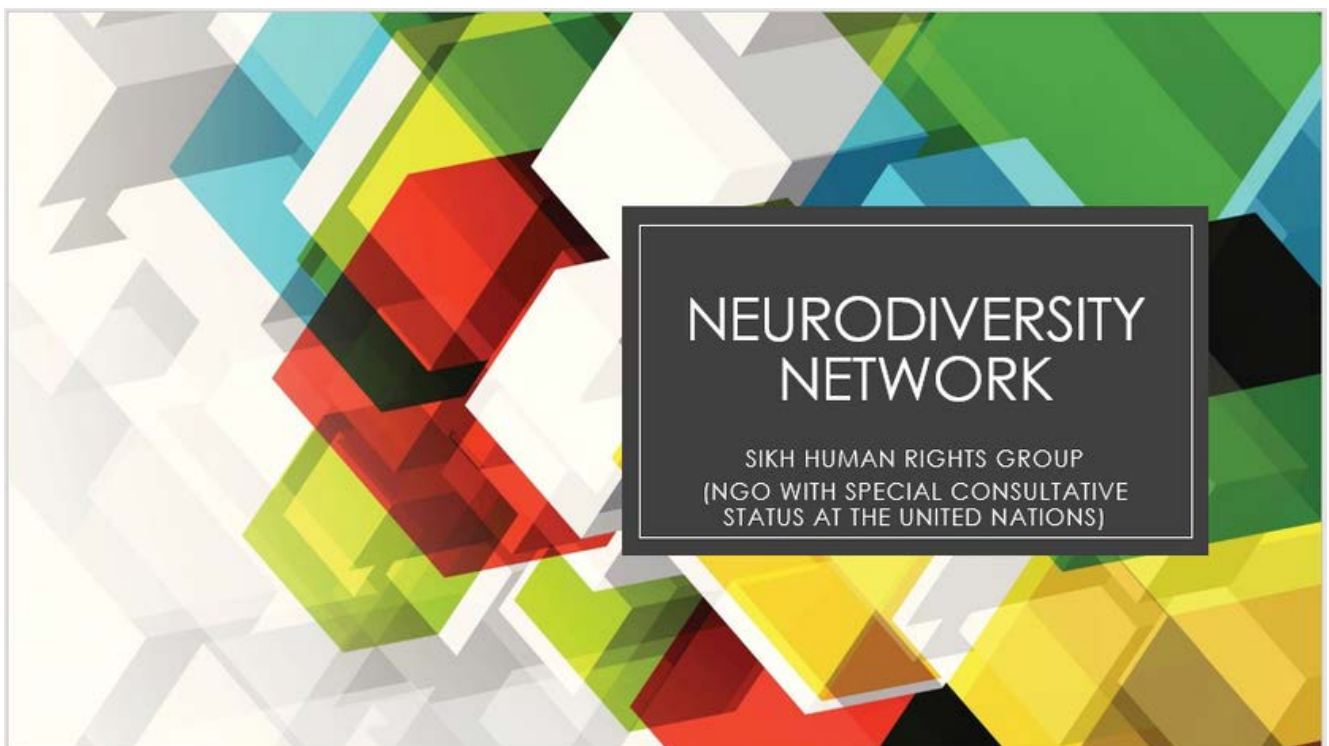
Our Values

- The Sikh Neurodiversity Network is inclusive and supports all families.
- Promote a better understanding of neurodiversity, how it impacts children, families, and others who come into contact with them.
- All individuals, regardless of their abilities, have the potential to thrive when supported by knowledgeable, protective, caring families and communities.
- Neurodiverse children are respected members of the families and integral to communities.
- Celebrate differences and value uniqueness.
- Inclusive environments like Gurdwaras should be accessible to everyone.
- Support is via personal experiences, education and knowledge.
- Individuals with neurodiversity, their families, those who work with them, and communities are supported through learning experiences and being more open to embracing differences.
- A safe space where people feel safe and respected.
- Enhance the quality of life of everyone living with neurodiversity by building friendly, inclusive communities.

APPENDIX 6: PRESENTATION CONTENT USED IN WORKSHOPS 1 AND 2



For the full presentation above please [click here](#)



For the full presentation above please [click here](#)