

WORKING TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC FUTURE

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

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WELCOME TO OUR OCTOBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

DIRECTORS NOTE

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

You now have our monthly newsletter for October after some delay. These last few months have been taken up by many United Nations engagements that included participating in COP27, the United Nations Forum on Minorities and the United Nations 11th Forum on Business and Human Rights amongst various others. The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) is also tying up meetings for some of our affiliated organisations with United Nations departments.

Please note that a full report on the Sikh Human Rights Group's engagement in COP27 will be released early in 2023 as a stand-alone publication. This was the first time that the SHRG was formally involved in any Conference of the Parties (COP) on its own. Previously we had to go as an affiliate of an accredited organisation.

In the busy period of October and November, as we prepared for COP27, the SHRG also continued its work on neurodiversity understanding, inclusion, engagement and acceptance. We have found that a comprehensive approach in the community setting is very successful. Parents, children, experts, doctors, Gurdwara staff, committee members, interested parties from the local council, and support services are involved.

The parents and carers involved in this project have found the Sikh Neurodiversity Network very useful as they meet other parents and carers in similar situations and find it comforting that they have access to medical experts and support services.

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the SHRG) has been leading this project. He has won the admiration of not only the parents, carers and experts but the children and young adults as well.

Over the course of 2022, Carlos has been helped by but by no means limited to Ms Karimul Dhillon, Ms Gurinder Kaur of the British Sikh Consultative Forum, Ms Rosy Bola (Clinical Child Psychologist), Dr Pawan Rajpal (Consultant Psychiatrist) and Mr Amarpreet Singh in establishing and managing this project. The success of the project has now reached other Gurdwaras across England and Wales and they are asking for sessions there. This is encouraging. Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Slough has already started neurodiversity inclusion sessions. There are also sessions planned in February 2023 for Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Luton) (Dallow Road).

For the SHRG, the greatest satisfaction is the children and young adults returning again and again to the weekly sessions.

The SHRG is always keen for more volunteers to help us expand this project to other places. The SHRG has also been bringing awareness about this project at the United Nations.

Please read this newsletter to find out more about the wonderful work that the team has done with children and their parents and carers.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jasdev Singh Rai

WELCOME TO OUR OCTOBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

EDITORS NOTE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

(HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER & PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE SHRG)

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott



(Mr Carlos Arbuthnott)



GURDWARA SRI GURU
SINGH SABHA
SOUTHALL

shrg
Sikh Human
Rights Group

SEND After School Club

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

Every Wednesday from 4:00pm to 5:30pm

At Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Upstairs Hall)

2-8 Park Avenue, Southall, UB1 3AG



LET'S LEARN ABOUT ...

GURDWARA SAHIB

SIKH CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

SENSORY PLAY

KIRTAN

STORIES - SAKHIES

SIKH RHYMES

MUCH MORE



PLAY. LEARN. GROW.

For more information please contact either:

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (English Speaker) via: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo

or

Ms Karimul Kaur Dhillon (Punjabi Speaker) via: 07546699115



Art Workshop

EVERY FRIDAY FROM 16:30 TO 17:30

GURDWARA SRI GURU SINGH SABHA SOUTHALL, GIANI DITT
SINGH HALL (ACCESSIBLE VIA THE RAISED CAR PARK), 2-8
PARK AVENUE, UBI 3AG

THIS EVENT IS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN OR YOUNG
ADULTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (ENGLISH SPEAKER) VIA: CARLOS.ARBUTHNOTT@SHRG.NGO

MS KARIMUL KAUR DHILLON (PUNJABI SPEAKER) VIA: [07546699115](tel:07546699115)

See you there!

SHRG UPDATE RE: SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK PROJECT

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

In 2020, the Sikh Human Rights Group received a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund for our Disability Community Support Network project that sought to assist families with neurodivergent children, particularly children with Autism to avoid isolation during the pandemic. The project was a remarkable success as it helped families come together, talk to each other, share their stories and concerns and learn from each other.

After the funding ended, the families requested that we continue. With help from Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall and in-kind work by a Sikh Human Rights Group Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator, psychiatrists, Gurdwara neurodiversity ambassadors, volunteers and interns we not only continued but expanded twofold.

The project has enabled many families with children on the Autism spectrum and the children themselves to connect and integrate with the community. The project was initially run only in Southall. Now there are four partnerships, and more are requesting. In other words, we are currently running or establishing projects in conjunction with the following institutions:

- Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall
- Sri Guru Singh Sabha Slough
- Smethwick Gurdwara (Birmingham)
- Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Luton)

The project aims to introduce children with Autism into community institutions such as Gurdwaras. At the same time, the project trains the staff, committees and the 'Sangat' (congregation) on how to engage with children and adults with Autism. It has started arranging training sessions and producing training materials for law enforcement agencies such as the Metropolitan police. The project is collaborating with local schools who feel happy that families can integrate with their own communities after school.

We found that there was considerable ignorance surrounding Autism. Individuals with Autism were considered rude or mentally 'disabled'. However, after a few training sessions and partnerships with key individuals in the Gurdwaras and families of children with Autism the atmosphere has changed dramatically.

The Gurdwaras provide sensory rooms and toys as children with Autism shun loud noises and crowds. Support groups are held on a weekly basis with refreshments. Children are given sensory toys to play with. In fact, often the whole family comes along. Siblings who are not on the spectrum are delighted that their brother or sister is engaged, calm and enjoying being part of the community. Often families felt unwanted and thought that they could not come to community institutions as they had to look after their children at home. This opportunity gives them great relief, warmth and satisfaction.

The project will continue its weekly meetings, SEND activity events, and once-a-week gatherings for parents and carers in Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall. This Gurdwaras facilities have become a hub in the West London region.

However, the project also aims to set up biweekly and then weekly gatherings in other focal Gurdwaras around the country, such as Barking, Kent, East London, Wolverhampton, Coventry and Leicester. We are also currently recruiting further medical specialists on a more sustained engagement as well as drafting bilingual training materials for staff, committee members, the Sangat and other children.

The project also aims to set up similar initiatives in other UK communities.

Therefore, if you like the sound of this project and you would like to become involved or you simply want to find out a little bit more information then please do not hesitate to contact Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the Sikh Human Rights Group) via: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo

Alternatively please visit our website by clicking [here](#)

SHRG UPDATE RE: MENSTRUAL CASE STUDY

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

We at the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) continue to engage the local community and help break the taboo and stigma associated with such important topics.

In late June Ms Bethan Walters (our Human Rights, Communications and Media Officer) spoke on behalf of the SHRG at the very first Panel on Menstrual Hygiene, Human Rights and Gender Equality at the United Nations in Geneva.

Ms Walters said:

'This was such an incredible experience and liberating to hear all of the panellists and country delegates discussing how important menstrual health, dignity, education and empowerment is.

One of the main points that we made was that while Menstrual Hygiene Day is an incredible and empowering day, the language and term hygiene is part of the stigma and taboo attached to menstruation. We recommend that we change the name to Menstrual Health or Menstruation Day.

This creates the opportunity for us to broaden the discussion on menstruation and allows us to tackle gendered-based tax discrimination; health, ethical and environmental impacts of menstrual products; the right to education; the rights of the child and the prevention of child marriage; the right to dignity; the right to health, both physical and mental; the right to work as well as access to adequate water and sanitation, all of which are linked to menstruation.

We also believe that if we celebrate Menstrual Health Day then we will be advancing the debate that menstrual products are health items and not luxury items. This will help so many around the world who are petitioning against the tampon tax that is still prevalent in most countries. The existence of the tampon tax is a clear example of gendered-based tax discrimination.

*Eliminating taxes on menstrual products, both sustainable and disposal, is consistent with the human right to be free from discrimination as enshrined in the **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1993** and the **Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**. It was very reassuring to hear so many agree with this position including the representative of the World Health Organisation and Spain. We are excited about this well overdue discussion and to be a part of this from the beginning and we look forward to next year's resolution...'*

Since this panel, the SHRG has partnered with FLUUS, who designed and produce the world's first certified flushable menstrual pad. With them, we are carrying out an international study in a variety of schools across Europe on the impacts and importance of free menstrual products in school toilets that are environmentally friendly.

We are working with a handful of schools from various economic backgrounds in the UK, Hungary and India between November 2022 and December 2023.

The intention is:

- For these schools to provide FLUUS products for free in all their female, disabled and unisex bathrooms.
- To have monthly check-in calls with Bethan, the project lead from the SHRG, Dr Olivia Ahn, the CEO of FLUUS, and the staff who are leading the project from the school and to speak with a handful of students before, during and after the case study begins. This is to keep a regular and open discussion continuing around the aforementioned topics and issues.

We want to measure how much the following has changed over the course of the case study:

- The taboo around menstruation.
- The student's and staff's attitude towards the environmental impact that their day-to-day products are having.
- Their school attendance.
- Their comfort at school.

If you like the sound of this project and you wish to become involved then please contact Ms Bethan Walters via:

bethan.walters@shrg.ngo

THE FIREARM SUICIDE EPIDEMIC: WHAT CAN BE DONE?

BY MS APRIL HAMILTON (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

On the 24th of May 2022, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, a former student, entered Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, killing nineteen primary school students and two teachers. This mass shooting shocked people across the country and is only one of many this year. While there is no agreed-upon definition of mass shootings, 2022 is said to have the highest number on record, with there being 600 thus far. There has not been a single week this year without a mass shooting. Compared to other member countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the rate of gun homicide in the United States is 25.2 times higher than that of its peers. This ratio only continues to increase, and as of 2022, gun violence is the leading cause of lives lost in the United States and is especially prevalent in major cities. While mass shootings receive the most attention, there is another, arguably more prevalent issue: firearm suicide.

Firearm suicide is eight times more likely in the United States compared to other high-income countries, and it accounts for more than 50% of suicides in the United States, claiming 24,292 lives in 2020 alone. Similarly, firearm suicide accounts for more than 50% of gun-related deaths each year. This does not imply that Americans are more suicidal; it is the byproduct of firearms being so effective: 90% of suicide attempts with a firearm result in death. Middle-aged white men that live in rural areas are especially at risk, as well as being more likely to own a firearm. Similarly, those with any mental illness are at risk, with these groups accounting for 45-90% of suicide deaths per year. This information makes one thing clear; firearm suicide is a significant issue that warrants an organised effort on a federal, state, and community scale.

Signed into law on the 25th of June 2022, the Safer Communities Act seeks to address the issues of firearm-related deaths and mental health care and treatment in the US. This includes the funding of telehealth services dedicated to mental health, the creation of the new 3-digit code, 988, for the Suicide Hotline, and \$250 million towards states, Washington DC, and territories to fund preexisting mental health services. Similarly, the law requires stricter policies relating to the purchase and distribution of guns, including raising the age of purchase eligibility to 21, an investigation of mental health records, and additional funding for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to perform background checks. Since this law was passed so recently, there has not been sufficient research to look at its impact, but there is still work to be done.

Firstly, there needs to be an increased understanding of the risk relating to firearm injury. In 1996 the Dicky Amendment was adopted, which disallowed the distribution of funding to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) directed toward firearm research and the impact of gun control policies. Until the revision of the amendment in 2018, the CDC avoided such research entirely, losing years of potential research and prevention. During that time, other organizations, such as Means Matter, one dedicated to decreasing the rate of suicide by restricting vulnerable individuals' access to firearms, as well as several university-funded firearms injury institutes, have dedicated themselves to such research. Secondly, there needs to be a greater understanding of mental health and suicide and more widely accessible and effective treatment programs. It is possible for these goals and others to be achieved. It is possible to stop the firearm suicide epidemic.



EFFECTS OF FOREIGN DEBT AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

BY MR IVAN LORENCI DE FRANCISCO (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG)
(GENEVA OFFICE)

At first, foreign debt and other international financial obligations may seem disconnected from the full enjoyment of human rights. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following lines, they are tightly interconnected; thus, civil society should be aware of their implications in our daily lives.

In their duty of achieving fundamental economic, social and cultural rights, Member States act constrained by their own national budgets. Amongst other ways, countries can finance themselves on the market by contracting debts. If the financing of a state is carried out with respect to factors such as responsible lending and borrowing, responsible terms and conditions, prudent use of loans and proper debt management, this debt can contribute to the economic development of countries and the establishment of the conditions necessary for the realisation of human rights. Nonetheless, when debt repayment is privileged over public and social investment, it undermines investment in services that contribute to the completion of human rights. It thus hinders the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The interaction between debt, the enjoyment of human rights and development was of concern to the international community because of the impact of the former on developing countries. However, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, sovereign debt problems are also occurring in developed countries. Therefore, there is a structural need to develop a framework in which countries can incur debt but their repayment is compatible with the full enjoyment of the human rights of their citizens.

Although numerous initiatives have been launched to address this issue, none have been able to provide an equitable and durable solution in line with United Nations Resolutions such as the 2030 Agenda.

In this context, the SHRG wants to inform civil society of the possible adverse effects on their rights that sovereign debt contraction may entail, promote reforms in how sovereign debt crises are both prevented and solved, draw attention to irresponsible financing practices and the legitimacy of the debts they entail and defend the need to prioritise people's needs over debt repayment.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS RE: VOLUNTEERING FOR THE SHRG

BY MS SAMRIDHI KUMAR (INTERN AT THE SHRG) (GENEVA OFFICE)

I interned with the Sikh Human Rights Group from the 10th of January 2022 to the 10th of April 2022. Throughout my internship, I reported directly to my supervisors Mr Albert Barseghyan and Mr Iván Lorenci de Francisco.

As an intern for the Sikh Human Rights Group, I supported the team by leading the drafting of a report on Artificial Intelligence from the planning to the compilation stage. I drafted a 10 thousand-word report on the Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights. To undertake this task, I reviewed numerous legal documents, reports, journal articles, policy papers, academic articles, etc... My knowledge regarding Artificial Intelligence and Big Data as well as its negative impacts on human rights grew exponentially whilst researching and drafting this report. In this report, I examined how artificial intelligence negatively affects a myriad of human rights, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, public participation, privacy, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, religion, assembly and association, amongst others... I conducted a comparative analysis of various existing regulatory frameworks to determine whether these negative impacts were sufficiently being addressed.

In addition to drafting this report, I also attended the 48th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council which was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from the 28th of February 2022 to the 1st of April 2022. Throughout this session, I attended numerous conferences such as the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food as well as the informal consultations on drafting Resolutions on the freedom of religion or belief, the rights of children, the rights of persons with disabilities, etc... I took notes and observed the discussions during the Human Rights Council Sessions. This opportunity exposed me to the mechanisms and procedural systems of the Human Rights Council and served as an overall one-of-a-kind opportunity to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the United Nations system's workings, particularly the role of civil society in UN activities. It is worth noting that as an intern with the Sikh Human Rights Group, I learnt and saw how civil society documented human rights violations in accordance with international standards and interacted with the UN, its subsidiary bodies, as well as representatives from Member State Governments. In addition, I attended several bilateral meetings and spoke with representatives from various Member States, international organisations, and civil society. One of the most important lessons that I learnt was how to lobby the Member States and to advocate for the Sikh Humans Right Groups mission.

My supervisors also empowered me to draft speeches as an intern on topics such as (1) the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography, and other child sexual abuse material, and (2) the challenges and opportunities for young people in the field of human rights. This task not only provided me with a better understanding of such human rights violations but also with an opportunity to improve my speech-writing skills.

In conclusion, as a participant in the Human Rights Council Regular Session and after drafting a report on human rights violations in the AI domain, I have gained a thorough understanding of the values, norms, and principles that underpin international human rights, as well as the UN Treaty Bodies, Member States, and civil societies that develop and promote them.



United Nations Engagement Opportunities 2023

A large, faint watermark of the United Nations logo is centered in the background. It features a world map within a circular frame, surrounded by a laurel wreath.

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



We are currently searching for secondary school and undergraduate students to help us prepare our written and oral statements on climate change adaptation and mitigation for the United Nations Human Rights Councils 2023 Regular Sessions:

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