



SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

(NGO WITH SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS AT THE UNITED NATIONS)

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SIKH HUMAN
RIGHTS GROUP



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As the United Nations started opening up in 2022 after the difficult years of COVID, Sikh Human Rights Group's (SHRG) engagement with the United Nations Human Rights Council and other bodies of the UN also increased. Not only did we engage with the Human Rights Council and other related bodies in Geneva but we also started participating in events in New York. The portfolio of SHRG is quite wide now. However, there is a considerable overlap and symbiotic relationship between the different strands of our work. By engaging in these various areas, the Sikh Human Rights Group itself has evolved a generic approach to all these different fields of activity. This approach is inspired from the Sikh worldview. It is also consistent with the United Nations Charter and Treaties.

Three words capture the SHRG approach. Pluralism, Dignity and EcoDiversity. **Pluralism** is the essential manifestation of all that exists. Nature is less universalist and more pluralist in almost all its aspects. Whether it is plant life, geology, climate, animal species, human cultures or sea life. Different subspecies within species appear to have different cultures and the vast diversity in plant life is simply unimaginable to fathom. There are plants that need carbon dioxide and yet others that need Oxygen and some even eat insects. Some plants thrive in the dark and others need the sunlight so compete to outgrow others in height. Similarly living species range from carnivorous to strictly herbivorous and some even cannibalistic. There is no universal culture about living beings nor a universal source of energy for them.

Human life and human communities too are quite diverse and pluralist in their cultural, linguistic, culinary tastes and worldviews. Some put a great deal of faith in a Deity, or God and others are Atheists. In an institution such as the United Nations, all human society needs to be represented and its diverse outlooks addressed. The Sikh Human Rights Group is sensitive to this and promotes plurality of approaches to meet basic human responsibilities and duties towards each other.

Dignity is something every creature and human being seeks. With it is respect. They form the basis of human rights. Right across the spectrum of plurality, there is also a desire for all to be treated with dignity and respect, free from torture, prejudice, discrimination and contempt. All civilisations put dignity and respect central in their philosophies or worldviews. Human Rights as articulated in many of the UN Treaties capture most of them eloquently. SHRG strives to promote dignity and respect across all its projects and within the plurality of worldviews.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The third word **EcoDiversity** has a number of meanings. However, we define it as the co dependency of all diversity, whether in human beings or in non human life, both plant, animals, etc... The diversity of all existence is intricately linked and so is the diversity of human life, organisations and cultures. This word helps us to treat all of our work as co dependent on others. For instance, the work on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises considers the plurality of approaches to ensure TNCs and OBEs comply with Human Rights to respect people and understand both natural biodiversity and human diversity.

Sikh Human Rights Groups personnel meets at least once a week to report on their projects and invite comments and advice from colleagues on how they can incorporate or ensure other aspects of SHRG policies and work can relate to the project they are managing. This holistic approach is central to SHRG and its work in international institutions.

NEURODIVERSITY PROJECT

Our Sikh Neurodiversity Network project went from a small National Lottery funded project to assist families with children on the Autism spectrum to a significant project in 2022 now funded by the community. The project has become a regular in Southall Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara and has started to expand into other Gurdwaras such as Singh Sabha, Slough.

Many families who were reluctant at first have joined the network and find it very supportive. The project is a learning experience and can be useful to other communities and Sikhs in other countries too. Its lessons are being recorded and will form a report to be handed to the United Nations.

The project was initially started to provide support for families with children on the Autism spectrum during COVID. An online and WhatsApp network kept the network going. It then became a project to integrate children and young adults with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) into community institutions, such as the Gurudwara. This also meant training staff and key members of the Gurdwara about neurodiversity. This has been a success. With the help of a psychiatrist and other medical experts, the project has been meeting this objective to the satisfaction of the children, young adults, parents, carers and the Gurdwara management.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

GENDER

Gender is often addressed with emphasis on 'equality' in most international discussions. Sikh Human Rights Group has focused on discrimination and injustices. There are three issues that have concerned SHRG. First is the failure of State Governments to appreciate that menstruation is not a luxury but an involuntary cycle in the lives of women. Yet products for menstrual health are taxed while products such as hair growth for men are treated as medicines. Second is the issue of child marriage that deprives many women of fulfilling their ambitions to higher education and jobs. Third is the matter of gender foeticide that seems to be widespread in Indian society but also in many other parts of the world. SHRG is concerned about the effect of climate change and poverty on women and is raising these concerns at UN forums in association with other NGOs.

SHRG developed a programme to work with other NGOs to raise the issue of what is generally called the 'tampon tax'. Governments have been imposing VAT on tampons and other products that help women to manage their menstrual time hygienically and comfortably. Otherwise many end up being exposed to potential infections or forced to be inactive due to lack of proper products. It is odd that a product that is essential to women is taxed whereas it should be offered free to women especially those in poverty.

SHRG has raised this matter at the UN Human Rights Council and held online events to discuss solutions to this human rights issue in 2022. It is also lobbying countries to address this. With its access to UN bodies and diplomats, SHRG is able to assist organisations working in the field to take this issue to the international forums.

There are some countries such as Kenya who have removed taxation on women's menstrual health products. India too has no tax on menstrual products. The United Kingdom removed the 5% tax in January 2021. However, in some countries the saving wasn't passed on. The supermarket and shopkeepers simply pocketed the difference.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Sikh Human Rights Group is campaigning on this as well and is lobbying Governments to fix prices on these products. In some countries such as India, these products are also given free to some sectors of society.

In 2023, SHRG will be holding further events on this human rights issue and raising it at the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW). It will also be developing an ongoing project on gender foeticide and asking UN bodies to be more concerned and proactive about redressing this.

DECLARATION ON DIVERSITY

The Declaration on Diversity is becoming a signature project of the Sikh Human Rights Group and known to many at the UN Human Rights Council. SHRG has been promoting this idea at every Human Rights Council and has now held three side events.

The concept behind this is simple. Diversity is not tolerated everywhere. There are many reasons for it including competition for resources, prejudice, fear of the unknown, ideological and sometimes lack of knowledge. Minorities often have to campaign for their right to be respected, to be treated as equal and to be accepted with their own identity. People often also campaign for rights of animals and biodiversity to exist as well.

The Rights regime is necessary to give people a legal instrument to protect and enforce their rights. However, it is an adversarial system and pushes against prejudices and discriminatory attitudes. The law can ensure that such negative attitudes do not influence the public space or State institutions, however it cannot change attitudes in the public personal domain. More often than not politics and populism also intervenes. Sometimes the struggle can be quite difficult and painful for those seeking to be treated with respect and dignity.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

A Declaration on Diversity will encourage States to put in place programmes that make diversity comfortable for the masses, change attitudes towards minorities and marginalised groups and promote diversity as a positive experience. The State will seek to ensure that minorities and the marginalised don't remain discriminated or feel the need to struggle to be treated with respect.

The Declaration will be non binding. This encourages States to introduce policies and programmes gradually and promote those that are most likely to be accepted and succeed first. States can show case what they have done to promote and sustain diversity and States can learn from each other.

SHRG's side event had the Permanent Mission of Bolivia on its first post COVID event panel. The Bolivian Plurinational Constitution is an inspiration on how two different worldviews can coexist in a State. The Bolivian State has a constitution that incorporates the indigenous culture and value systems and also that of the settlers who have been in power.

The videos from these side events are accessible via website. They are worth watching. SHRG is continuing with this project and hopes it becomes a UN Declaration.

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



UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

One of the United Nation's focuses in the last decade has been to boost progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and try to achieve them by 2030. These goals abbreviated as SDGs are very comprehensive. They cover almost all areas of UN work, from human rights, peace, equality, alleviation of poverty and hunger, climate issues, environment, community, partnerships and more. There are seventeen broad goals and each of the goals has subgoals.

The UN SDGs are becoming very significant. They are the goals that the UN has set itself in various fields of development. These are goals that many States have committed to.

SHRG believes that civil society should be encouraged to commit to the SDGs. Only with wider civil society engagement can the Sustainable Development Goals be achieved by 2030.

Sikh Human Rights Group is of the view that many Gurdwaras are already committed to the aims of the SDGs particularly in fields of hunger, poverty alleviation, gender, interfaith, community support and in some cases climate mitigation as well as environment. SHRG will be encouraging Gurdwaras to become more aware of the SDGs and also bring awareness to the UN of the role Gurdwaras play in promoting the SDGs.

A man in a dark pinstripe suit and blue patterned tie is shown from the chest down. He is holding a transparent globe with a wireframe overlay in his left hand. In his right hand, he holds a wooden gavel. The background is a blurred office setting with bookshelves. Overlaid on the image are a scale of justice and a network of glowing nodes connected by lines.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Sikh Human Rights Group has been involved in the issue of Transnational Corporations and their transgressions on human rights of individuals and communities since 1997. Since obtaining Special Consultative Status at the United Nations, SHRG's position is that transnationals are too big to be held to account by States. There have to be international mechanisms to hold them to account for human rights violations.

SHRG has been attending and contributing to the work of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnationals Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Respect to Human Rights where a legally Binding Instruments is currently being drafted.

The Working Group has taken on board quite a few of our concerns. It has established some mechanisms for accountability and also reporting at the United Nations on Human Rights violations by Transnational Corporations. However, SHRG is pushing for more robust mechanisms and even a separate institution within the UN to monitor TNCs and OBEs.



COP 27

In 2022, the Sikh Human Rights Group managed to obtain accreditation (Observer Status) to UNFCCC, which is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This enabled SHRG to attend COP 27 which was held in Sharma-El-Sheik in Egypt. Some 25,000 delegates attended. Many important decisions were made. Two significant issues at COP 27 were the threat to Island states by rising sea levels and the 'Loss and Damage' demand by many developing countries who are seeking some form of compensation finance to help them mitigate climate change effects.

Many developing countries feel that they are having to pay the highest price for the damage done to the climate by industrialised developed countries. The effects of climate and climate change do not recognise boundaries nor State GDP. However, countries with strong and advanced economies can spend on mitigating technologies whilst developing countries have almost no financial ability to take measures to address current crises let alone take steps to make themselves immune from further climate deterioration.

Since most developing countries are in the Global South, the tropics, where climate is getting hotter, sea levels are rising, land is becoming barren or ravaged by floods and food security is under threat, they seek funds from international institutions to take steps to address this as well as input safeguards from further threats. This is called 'loss and damage' in the UNFCCC deliberations.

This was SHRG's first participation at COP under its own banner. We were not permitted to host a side event or a stall. We will plan that for 2023.

We took members of Nishan-e-Sikhi from Khadur Sahib as partners. The Khadur Sahib environmental project is one of the most advanced and successful among Sikhs. Two delegates came from Nishan-e-Sikhi as part of our team. They were overwhelmed and delighted by the engagement. We will be taking more in 2023.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

OTHER PROJECTS

The Sikh Human Rights Group continued working on many of its other projects. It is concerned with Food Security, promotes Organic Farming and supported Small Farmers in India. It is particularly concerned at the effect of the World Trade Organisation on small farmers. The WTO's policies tend to favour large commercial farm holdings. It is not a part of the UN bodies. Hence it's not bound by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It is mainly concerned with the market and preventing market distortions as well as assisting in trade deals.

SHRG feels that the WTO should be cognisant of the SDGs and Human Rights and a mechanism should be found for it to incorporate these in its policies and agreements as a requirement rather than voluntary exercise.

We hope that in 2023, we increase our participation in UN bodies. Setting up an office in Geneva has been a very beneficial step for the Sikh Human Rights Group. This gives us the opportunity to network with many other like-minded NGOs and States who will support our propositions.

We are also very grateful to Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall (SGSSS) for supporting us throughout 2022. The Gurdwara is the most influential Sikh institution in Europe. It has always engaged in projects of the Sikh community at large that take the Sikh perspective to national and international platforms. SGSSS is a partner in some of the SHRG's projects.

Equally we are grateful to a group of patrons in Canada-USA who have been supporting our work in the United States. This group has been impressed by the work of the Sikh Human Rights Group and takes pride that a Sikh perspective is at last reaching the international world.

A person in a wheelchair is seen from behind, sitting on a sandy beach. They are holding a large bunch of colorful balloons (pink, yellow, blue, and purple) that float into the sky. The person's arms are outstretched, holding the strings of the balloons. The background shows the ocean waves and a clear sky. The title 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY' is overlaid in large white letters.

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 2023 and beyond.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network project (SNN) was founded in November 2020 by Mr Carlos Arbuthnott a Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) with the assistance of a small National Lottery grant.

The founding objective of this project was to conduct research into BAME communities, in particular the Sikh community, in West London in order to unearth what lifelong neurological characteristics were most prevalent within the aforementioned communities and what barriers to understanding, acceptance, inclusion and support such individuals faced. In order to undertake this research we consulted with a wide variety of stakeholders ranging from Granthis (priests), Gurdwara committee members, Sevadars (Gurdwara volunteers), members of the Sangat (congregation) and of course those who possess lifelong neurological characteristics and their friends, families and carers. We also spoke to a wide variety of professionals such as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) charity case workers, occupational therapists, school SENDCOs, teachers, local authority representatives, clinical child psychologists, educational psychologists, etc... who have now become involved in our SNN.

From the above research, it quickly became apparent that the most frequent diagnosis was autism spectrum disorder (hereafter referred to as ASD). However, it is important to note that our participants often also possess other mental and/or physical impairments. Nevertheless, from these discussions, it also became apparent that there was a lack of engagement between the families in question and their communities. In particular engagement with their community and religious institutions. To use the Sikh community as an example there is often a lack of engagement between those with ASD and their Gurdwaras. This is most commonly due to sensory issues (bright lights, heavy footfalls, loud noises, etc...) and a lack of education, understanding and compassion from others within the Sangat (congregation).

In order to begin redressing this and to pilot his model Mr Carlos Arbuthnott began hosting monthly SEND Engagement Events at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (UB1 3AG & UB2 4NP) in December 2021. At these events were food and drink, sensory toys, arts and crafts materials, board games, etc... for the children and young people to play with and to become more familiar with the sensory-dampened environment. However, it also provided Mr Carlos Arbuthnott and his volunteers with the opportunity to speak to the parents and carers about any issues that they were currently experiencing and most importantly how the SNN could help them to overcome those issues.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

After our yearlong National Lottery funding ended the parents, carers, siblings, professionals and those with lifelong neurological characteristics who were involved in our SNN requested that we can continue our activities. Consequently, the SNN has now grown considerably both in terms of its geographical reach but also participant size – as of December 2022.

For convenience I have briefly summarised our current activities below:

On a weekly basis, we host a Wednesday SEND Afterschool Club and a Friday Evening SEND Arts & Crafts Workshop at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall. On a fortnightly basis, we host SEND parent and carer support group sessions. Focused primarily on education, medical, employment and financial issues. Third-party SEND charities, medical professionals, local authority representatives, etc... often attend these sessions to provide our parents and carers with an insight into the wider support that is available to them both in the local area and nationally. The SNN does not wish to operate in isolation. We also provide specific workshops to parents and carers regarding for example the drafting and enforcement of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the drafting of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) applications, changing from one school to another, etc... Parents and carers involved in our SNN also have access to the informative pamphlets and videos that we continue to prepare on various SEND topics.

On a fortnightly basis (every other Tuesday) we host a SEND Afterschool Club at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Slough. We also regularly host SEND parent and carer support group sessions (please see above for more details). In addition, we are currently in the process of arranging monthly SEND sporting events at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Sloughs sporting facilities. These sessions will include gymnastics coaching, trampolining, etc...

On 02 May 2023, we will begin hosting a SEND Afterschool Club, SEND Arts & Crafts Workshops and SEND parent and carer support group sessions at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Luton.

N.B. At all of the above locations we either currently host or will be hosting medical practitioner-led SEND training days for Granthis, Gurdwara committee members, security guards and Sangat. These sessions are run in both English and Punjabi. The support and uptake for our SNN has on all occasions increased dramatically.



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

The Sikh Human Rights Group (Mr Carlos Arbuthnott); the 1928 Institute (a not-for-profit University of Oxford spin-out); and Ms Satnam Kaur FCCA (Expert by Experience, Sikh Helpline, Steering Group member Oxfordshire Family Support Network and Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum) are undertaking a review into the support available to those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) such as those with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis. We are committed to supporting individuals with SEND and ensuring they receive support to enable them to live happy, healthy and independent lives within their communities. The findings of this review will be presented to UK Government officeholders such as the Minister of Health (agreed through the 1928 Institute) as well as the United Nations Primary Treaty Bodies, United Nations office holders, the World Health Organization (agreed with the Sikh Human Rights Group) and other relevant stakeholders who are currently involved in our SNN in order to inform the future delivery of services for people with SEND.

On an annual basis, the SHRG prepares written and oral statements for the Regular Sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council (three per annum); written and oral statements for the United Nations Human Rights Councils Advisory Committee; and written and oral statements for the United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights Re: Neurodiversity.

N.B. There are various other SEND projects and activities that we coordinate. However, the above are the highlights.

For more information regarding our SNN please click [here](#)



SIKH NEURODIVERSITY NETWORK

Plans for 2023 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 neurotypical and neurodiverse youth engagement events. Primarily, targeted at forging genuine and subsisting relationships between neurotypical and neurodiverse youth.**
- (5) 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.

Accept.
Understand.
Love





In 2022, the Sikh Human Rights Group participated in COP 27. This was the first time we participated under our own banner.

As it was the first time, we could not hold a side event or have a display booth. However, we engaged with a number of COP officials, State delegates and NGOs as well as Business stalls.

We were interested in a number of issues and have made our analysis for future participation in issues where we can bring our own expertise and experience.

We were fortunate to have two delegates from Nishan-e-Sikhi from Khadur Sahib, Punjab, India.


Both our group and members of Nishan-e-Sikhi enjoyed and learnt a great deal about climate issues. We decided to plan together for COP 28 in 2023 in Dubai for a side event and an exhibition if we succeed in getting slots.

The hosting of COP27 in the green city of Sharm-El-Sheikh this year marked the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In the thirty years since the world has come a long way in the fight against climate change and its adverse impacts on our planet, we are now able to understand the science behind climate change better, better assess its impacts, and better develop tools to address its causes and consequences.

Thirty years and twenty-six COPs later, we now have a much clearer understanding of the extent of the potential climate crisis and what needs to be done to address it effectively. The science is there. It clearly shows the urgency with which we must act regarding rapidly reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, taking necessary steps to assist those in need of support to adapt to the negative impacts of climate change, and finding the appropriate formula that would ensure the availability of requisite means of implementation that are indispensable for developing countries in making their contributions to this global effort, especially in the midst of the successive international crises, including the ongoing food security crisis exacerbated by climate change, desertification and water scarcity, especially in Africa that suffers the most impacts. Some of the observations were:



- **Loss and Damage:** Small win, but the fight continues: Thanks to unwavering efforts from vulnerable countries, activists and civil society, COP27 has committed to creating a Loss and Damage fund to support the most impacted communities by climate change. The breakthrough deal came as costs from extreme weather soar to over \$200 billion annually. The fight is not over: details on who will contribute to the fund or on the accessibility to the financial arrangements will have to be negotiated in the upcoming years.
- **Fossil fuel loopholes for petro-states and industry:** COP27 started to address the symptoms of the climate crisis but did little to address its causes. More fossil fuels will mean more loss and damage. The scale of influence of the fossil-fuel industry and States supporting it was evident. At the last minute, “low emissions” was added to language about renewables being the best solution to the energy crisis, creating a loophole for petro-states and the fossil fuel industry. This should be addressed in the United Arab Emirates in 2023.
- **Mitigation and Energy ends in disappointment:** Despite a last-minute push from the High Ambition Coalition to strengthen the coal phase-down text to expand to all fossil fuels, the final COP27 outcome on energy is a disappointment shared by many concerned NGOs and parties as it does not bring us any closer to addressing the climate crisis. The key language for accelerating efforts on coal phase-down and fossil subsidy phase-out is a cut and paste of commitments in the Glasgow Climate Pact. Renewable energy was positively mentioned, including the 4 trillion USD per annum investment required by 2030 to reach net zero emissions by 2050.
- **1.5°C:** All eyes on biodiversity COP: But Sharm-el-Sheikh’s failure to move on emissions occurred even though the world has experienced politics-altering climate impacts such as flooding in Pakistan and Nigeria. 1.5°C was referenced in the deal, only as recognition of the goal. Pathways and plans to actually achieve it were absent. Holding warming to this limit will reduce the suffering of much of the world – what matters is real, rapid emissions cuts. We need leaders to break from the fossil-fuel industry once and for all. We cannot reach 1.5°C without protecting nature. It was stressed that world leaders must get back on track by agreeing to an ambitious global deal for nature at the Biodiversity COP 15.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

COP 27 had a Gender Day on the second Monday. The common theme was that women are the solution to climate change, not just the victims who need saving. Therefore, they need to be at the table making the decisions, and they need to be in charge of the finances and resources.

We made a statement in the panel discussion on **Nordic/African leaders: why gender is the key to the green transition**, asking the question, 'How can women and girls be at the decision-making table if they have to miss school and/or work for a potential 7 days once a month/cycle?' Menstrual products are not luxury items, and yet most women around the world are paying the luxury/tampon tax.

We pointed out that a bathroom is 100% prepared for men and 50% prepared for a woman. We stated the need for free menstrual products in all public places, but we also need to invest in sustainable products like FLUUS or Saathi Pads, so we are not solving one problem and causing another.

15TH SESSION ON FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

The Forum on Minority Issues takes place every year around late November or early December. We have been participating in it. In 2022, we expressed the need for more pluralistic language, inclusivity and insight from all minority groups. We also proposed the need for a Declaration on Diversity. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities adopted 30 years ago remains the only global instrument for the protection of minority rights. A broader declaration on Diversity will make all inclusive.

The current Conventions and Treaties have an implicit tension whereby minorities are almost forced to seek rights, respect and equality rather than be provided without having to campaign. With a Declaration on Diversity, countries will be encouraged to take proactive steps to make minorities inclusive. We also suggested that when tackling issues of discrimination faced by minorities, it is essential that minorities are also involved in the decision-making and solutions. The Sikh Human Rights Group also believes a pluralist approach is a way forward that will make society comfortable with minorities globally.



MENSTRUAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

In the Special Rapporteur's report entitled **A/77/246**, it is clear the human rights of minorities are of utmost importance, so civil society and minorities must be involved in solutions since those decided by Governments alone have not really worked.

Secondly, as stated by the Special Rapporteur, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities was adopted 30 years ago in 1992, yet threats to minorities remain, with many becoming Stateless. Taking an evidence-based approach, it is worth asking whether a set of instruments can be complimented by other approaches if they are repeatedly ignored or violated.

We need the conceptual language of Conventions to be pluralistic in nature and to reflect the wisdom of different civilisations. It is then that a Declaration will be better understood, embraced and observed.

We at the SHRG believe a Declaration on Diversity is needed now more than ever. At a time when the number of minorities becoming Stateless is increasing due to the impacts of climate change, war and food insecurity, a creative, pluralist and realist approach may be one solution. It will promote coexistence and make society comfortable with diversity and minorities.



INTERNSHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCE ENGAGEMENT

DILPREET:

Dilpreet joined the SHRG at COP 27 in Sharm-El-Sheikh for the second week of COP. She was a great asset and developed her networking skills to create long-term working relationships for the NGO. She presented her experience to her local Gurdwara and at IBM. Since COP 27, she has been in charge of our monthly Newsletter and collecting stories. She will be joining us for COP 28 in the UAE.

JORDAN:

Jordan has been with us since October 2022 and has been a great help in doing background research as well as networking. She has been learning how the UN works and has enjoyed her experience. She will be assisting Bethan at CSW 67 in 2023 in New York.





NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

With the rapid advancements in modern technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and other information and communication technologies, the ways in which humans interact, work, and communicate are inevitably changing. However, the presence of these new technologies poses a risk to the full enjoyment of our human rights. Therefore, the right to privacy plays a crucial role in safeguarding individuals and enabling the exercise of other human rights, including freedom of expression, identity, beliefs, and participation in various aspects of life.

To ensure adequate privacy protection, it is necessary to interpret the right more broadly and emphasize its positive aspects in relation to other human rights. Improper handling of personal data, such as inappropriate collection or misuse, can infringe on people's privacy. In response, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) focuses on two key actions to protect the right to privacy:

- (1) Advocating for binding international regulations that grant individuals ownership of their personal data, preventing its sale or processing by third parties without proper consent.
- (2) Raising awareness within communities about the potential risks of improper handling of personal data, which can undermine fundamental human rights, including freedom from discrimination, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion.

Raising awareness serves two purposes:

In the short term, individuals become more conscious of the implications when their personal data is collected, allowing them to take appropriate actions such as rejecting unnecessary cookies.

In the long term, it creates a societal understanding of the dangers posed by inadequate legislation, gaining support among the population. This support enables lobbying efforts for an enhanced legal framework to protect privacy.

By pursuing these actions, the SHRG aims to protect privacy rights, empower individuals to make informed choices about their personal data, and ultimately foster a more robust legal framework that safeguards privacy in the face of evolving technologies.



NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

OUR STANCE ON THE ISSUE AND OUR LONGITUDINAL OBJECTIVES

Since the establishment of our programme on the impact of new technologies on the enjoyment of human rights at the SHRG in 2021, we have forged connections with like-minded NGOs and engaged with delegations from UN member countries that have advanced legislation on personal data protection. Through these partnerships, we can pool resources and expertise, strengthening our efforts to uphold the right to privacy.

Recognizing that violating privacy affects the full realization of numerous fundamental rights, our work in this domain involves collaboration with various stakeholders. We engage with organizations focused on new technologies and groups such as journalists, political activists, and religious associations. By fostering these diverse partnerships, we aim to address the multifaceted aspects of privacy infringement and ensure the protection of individuals' rights.

By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, we leverage the resources available within the United Nations to advance our cause. We utilize various tools, including oral and written statements presented at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and suggestions made during the Universal Periodic Review, to advocate for the enactment of binding legislation that recognizes individuals' ownership rights over their personal data.

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, flying against a clear blue sky.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

UN ENGAGEMENT

We submitted one written statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) at its 49th Regular Session. Within this written statement, we congratulated the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the publication of its Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. With this set of recommendations, UNESCO took a giant step forward in the regulation of such technology to improve human existence. However, it remains what it is. A set of recommendations whose application is voluntary on the part of the very actors whose behaviour undermines the enjoyment of human rights.

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

During the same Human Rights Council Regular Session, we participated in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur (SR) on the Right to Privacy. In our intervention, we commended the progress made by some countries in the Latin American region in creating and implementing systems that protect the privacy and personal data of its citizens. Similarly, we raised concerns about the implementation of public policies in the same region, such as digital IDs that collect extensive personal data or population surveillance systems, which directly undermine the full enjoyment of human rights, particularly among minority groups.

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

We also engaged in the Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the Right to Privacy in the 51st session of the HRC. With our participation in this dialogue, we supported the moratorium on the sale, transfer, and use of hacking tools until human rights-based safeguards are in place. We also reminded the international community of the outdated nature of our human rights treaties concerning Artificial Intelligence and new technologies. Finally, we called upon United Nations Member States to establish mechanisms for reporting public and private surveillance abuses. We believe that transparently disclosing which software, private companies, and public agencies are involved in surveillance activities will enhance accountability and stimulate a debate on this issue.

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

FOREIGN DEBT, OTHER INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Despite numerous debt-rescheduling efforts, developing countries persistently find themselves paying more each year in debt servicing than the amount they receive in official development assistance. The escalating debt burden experienced by the most heavily indebted developing nations is untenable, posing a significant barrier to sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Excessive debt servicing has severely constrained the capacity of many developing countries to foster social development and deliver essential services necessary for the realization of economic, social, and cultural rights. This limitation hampers their ability to create an environment conducive to fulfilling these rights.

OUR STANCE ON THE ISSUE AND OUR LONGITUDINAL OBJECTIVES

Unfortunately, in the realm of debt issues, lenders wield significant influence in establishing rules and definitions, creating a system that pushes numerous impoverished nations into enduring indebtedness. Regrettably, this system cannot effectively address debt crises promptly, fairly, and sustainably. As the landscape of developing country debt grows more intricate, with the emergence of new and increasingly commercial lenders alongside traditional creditors, the risks to debt sustainability escalate. Moreover, market-based approaches to development further compound these risks.

To mitigate the adverse effects of foreign debt and other financial obligations, the SHRC has decided to act on several fronts. On the one hand, we propose to educate the staff of international financial institutions on human rights and the UN SDGs. In this way, they will be more likely to develop policies that are more respectful of human rights. In addition, we support the creation of an international mechanism and the establishment of guiding principles for the conduct of sovereign debt restructuring.

As for our other working topics, we use all the tools at our disposal within the UN framework to promote our point of view. We submit oral and written statements to the Human Rights Council and suggestions to countries during the Universal Periodic Review. We also engage with other NGOs and think tanks who share our views on this matter.

FOREIGN DEBT, OTHER INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

UN ENGAGEMENT

During the 49th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, we participated in the Interactive Dialogue with the newly appointed Independent Expert (IE) on foreign debt and other financial obligations, Professor Waris. With our intervention, we reminded the international community of the importance of designing policies that guarantee both debt repayment and human rights. Additionally, we advocated for the establishment of a global framework, in collaboration with the UN and Member States, to facilitate the restructuring of sovereign debt. Such a mechanism would effectively prevent chaotic and protracted debt restructurings, thereby minimizing their adverse impact on the realization of human rights. Lastly, we emphasized the significance of developing guiding principles that govern the process of sovereign debt restructuring. These principles would ensure that debt restructurings are conducted fairly, timely, inclusive, and comprehensively.

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





EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

For those living in poverty, many human rights are beyond their reach. Alongside numerous other deprivations, they frequently lack access to education, healthcare, clean drinking water, and basic sanitation. They are often marginalized from meaningful participation in the political process and denied justice for human rights abuses.

Extreme poverty is a complex phenomenon with multiple dimensions. It is not solely a matter of inadequate income; it encompasses various other factors as well. Many international organizations still measure poverty exclusively based on income, such as the World Bank's definition of living on less than \$1.90 a day. These approaches fail to capture the intricate nature of extreme poverty and its extensive impact on human rights.

Extreme poverty can both cause and result from specific human rights violations. For instance, low-income people may be compelled to work in hazardous and unhealthy conditions, leading to rights violations. Simultaneously, poverty can also stem from human rights violations, such as when children cannot break free from poverty due to insufficient access to education the state provides.

The eradication of extreme poverty should not be viewed merely as an act of charity but as an urgent human rights issue. Its persistence in countries capable of eliminating it constitutes a blatant violation of fundamental human rights.

UN ENGAGEMENT

We engaged in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty during the Human Rights Council in its 50th Regular Session. With our intervention, we underlined the fact that poverty finds its roots in the inaction of states to make the excluded the central actor in devising social policies.

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

RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

We also participated in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development (R2D) during the 51st Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Our intervention addressed two issues:

First, we supported the creation of a legal instrument for the identification, seizure and confiscation of illicit assets under the auspices of the United Nations.

Secondly, we pointed out that transnational corporations and other business enterprises with value chains in various jurisdictions use tax engineering schemes to avoid paying the taxes they should be paying. This significantly impacts developing countries, as the taxes collected enable them to finance the public policies that will allow them to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

