

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP AT HRC57

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As the Human Rights Council's sessions conclude until February next year, the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) reflects on 2024, particularly the recent session, with a renewed sense of progress toward our objectives. Thanks to the collaboration of many individuals - including our intern Giulia Azarello and support from the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall individuals - we were actively engaged in all forms of NGO participation.

Striving for a pluralistic society and sustainable development for all, we organised the side event **“Reimagining Development: Inclusive Models for Sustainable and Equitable Development”**. This event explored alternative development models that respect diverse worldviews and promote sustainable, equitable growth, aligning with the *UN Declaration on the Right to Development's* emphasis on human-centred, inclusive, and accountable practices fostering cultural diversity and international cooperation. Our esteemed panellists included **Mr. Harmeet Singh Gill**, Secretary General of the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall; **His Excellency Ambassador Dr. Abdallah Possi from the Permanent Mission of Tanzania**; and **Rev. Nicole Ashwood**, Programme Executive at the World Council of Churches (WCC). You can watch the recording [here](#).

Our first esteemed panelist, Reverend Ashwood, emphasised her advocacy for women's rights and social justice in legislative spaces. She highlighted the urgent need to **revise global development practices to combat climate change, inequality, and conflict, advocating for a sustainable and equitable economic model**. Stressing the role of faith communities, she called for international cooperation and structural economic reforms to ensure gender parity and ecological sustainability. She was followed by H.E. Ambassador Possi, who discussed the complexities of defining 'development', emphasising its evolution towards a more holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental factors. He stressed the need for development to be both sustainable and equitable, with a strong focus on inclusivity to ensure that all communities have fair access, participation, and benefits. Furthermore, he advocated for **international cooperation to address global inequalities and align development goals with human rights standards**, ensuring substantive progress towards global equity and sustainability.



Finally, **Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall** significantly contributed to our side event by highlighting **how Sikh traditions promote sustainable and inclusive development through community-focused institutions like Gurdwaras**. Mr. Gill showcased the Langar system—a community kitchen providing free meals to all—which epitomises Sikh values of selfless service, inclusivity, and equality. We also participated in all categories of oral interventions during the Human Rights Council (HRC), including **Annual Discussions, Interactive Dialogues, and General Debates, bringing attention to key issues**.

The Importance of Contextualising Human Rights Frameworks

We stressed that global approaches must consider civilisational, regional, and societal diversity to be effective, rather than imposing a universal model that may not fit all contexts.

- In our oral statement during the **General Debate on Item 2**[1] of the agenda of the Human Rights Council, we questioned why human rights violations persist with such impunity 75 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We suggested investigating whether different civilisations have distinct conceptual frameworks on dignity, respect, conflict resolution, coexistence, and diversity. This oral statement is available for viewing at [this link](#).
- During the **General Debate on Item 8**[2], we proposed rethinking the principles of the Vienna Declaration to make them more implementable across diverse societies, drawing parallels with evidence-based medicine. You may watch this statement at [this link](#).
- During the **Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order**, we discussed the need for a genuine dialogue between civilisations that respects different historical and cultural contexts, suggesting that a pluralistic approach might be more effective. The full statement can be found at [this link](#).

[1] Annual report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and report of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

[2] Follow-up to and Implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Promoting Inclusive and Participatory Development Models

We advocated transitioning from a profit-maximising “growthism” model to development determined by rights holders themselves, emphasising local autonomy and democratic implementation of strategies.

- In our intervention during the General Debate on Item 3[3], we highlighted the limitations of the prevailing growth-centric model and urged a shift towards a human-centred economy. We emphasised that development should be determined by local people, allowing them to democratically implement their vision. Please find this oral statement at [this link](#).
- During the Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on the Rights of Peasants, we emphasised the need for greater awareness of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) in rural communities. We addressed tensions between WTO policies and peasant rights, urging the incorporation of peasant rights into global trade agreements or bringing agriculture under the UN system. This statement is accessible at [this link](#).

Advancing Gender Equality and Recognising Menstrual Health

We underscored that menstrual health affects education, employment, and healthcare outcomes for girls and women. Lack of access to accurate information, healthcare services, and menstrual hygiene products hinders their full participation in society.

- In the Annual Discussion on the Integration of a Gender Perspective, we addressed menstrual health as an essential human rights issue requiring urgent attention. We called upon National Human Rights Institutions to advocate for its inclusion in national health agendas and to promote comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. You can view this statement at [this link](#).

As we transition from human rights to governance, a recurring theme emerges: **the need for accountability and inclusivity to ensure fair practices and representation for all stakeholders.**

[3] Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

- We also intervened during the HRC agenda item 5[4] on human rights bodies and mechanisms. With our intervention, we expressed the necessity for mechanisms to hold transnational corporations accountable for their conduct. We suggested wider circulation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and urged engagement with trade unions to inform their members about these mechanisms. The full text of this statement is available at [this link](#).
- In our **Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development**, we emphasised the critical link between the right to development and the well-being of children and future generations. We supported a holistic approach that includes investing in child development and ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. You may watch this oral statement at [this link](#).
- During the **General Debate on Item 9**[5], we proposed creating a UN **Declaration on Diversity** and an **Annual UN Diversity Day**. This initiative would unify existing rights-based frameworks and encourage states to promote diversity through a cohesive commitment, fostering inclusivity and reducing discrimination. This statement can be viewed at [this link](#).

By addressing these critical issues, we aim to promote culturally sensitive human rights frameworks, foster sustainable development practices that are inclusive and participatory, advance gender equality, and ensure accountability for all stakeholders. Building upon our oral interventions, we also submitted four written statements to the Human Rights Council, reinforcing our dedication to promoting human rights across various domains. These submissions allowed us to delve deeper into important topics and offer concrete recommendations for global action.

Promoting Inclusivity and Cultural Change through a Comprehensive Declaration on Diversity

We emphasised the necessity of fostering cultural change to effectively combat racism, xenophobia, and related forms of intolerance. Legal protections and human rights mechanisms are essential but insufficient on their own; making societies more comfortable with diversity through proactive measures is crucial.

[4] Human rights bodies and mechanisms

[5] Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Forms of Intolerance, Follow-Up to and Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

- In our written statement titled **“Promoting Inclusivity and Cultural Change: Toward a Comprehensive Declaration on Diversity”**, we proposed creating a **Declaration on Diversity**. This aims to inspire positive action plans that encourage inclusivity, greater interactions, and a deeper understanding of human diversity. By complementing human rights approaches with initiatives that influence behaviour and attitudes, we can eliminate discrimination rooted in cultural habits and personal beliefs. You can read the full statement at [this link](#).

Enhancing Accessibility of Human Rights Reporting and Integrating Civil Society into UN Mechanisms

We addressed the complexities ordinary people face when navigating human rights reporting mechanisms. To make these processes more effective, it's crucial to demystify them and involve civil society more directly in UN deliberations.

- In our written statement titled **“Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusivity: Proposals for Demystifying Human Rights Reporting and Integrating Civil Society in the United Nations Mechanisms”**, we suggested that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should simplify and widely publicise reporting procedures. Additionally, we recommended including NGO representatives in the Human Rights Advisory Committee to ensure civil society perspectives are integral to UN discussions. You can read the full statement at [this link](#).

Redefining Development by Embracing Cultural Diversity and Sustainability

We called for redefining development models to integrate different worldviews and practices that favour ecological sustainability and social justice. Moving beyond the traditional growth-centric approach, we advocated for development that is culturally inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

- In our written statement titled **“Redefining Development: Embracing Cultural Diversity and Sustainability in Global Development Goals”**, we highlighted various indigenous philosophies – such as **Ubuntu**, **Surbatt Da Bhalla**, and **Suma Qamaña** –which offer alternative perspectives on development. These approaches emphasise interconnectedness, harmony with nature, and prioritising well-being over material wealth. You may read the entire statement at [this link](#).

Integrating Menstrual Health into Human Rights Frameworks

We underscored the importance of recognising menstrual health as a critical aspect of women's rights and gender equality. Addressing menstrual health is essential for ensuring women and girls can fully participate in society without stigma or discrimination.

- In our written statement titled **“Integrating Menstrual Health into Human Rights Frameworks: A Call for Global Action and Gender Equality”**, we urged the Human Rights Council and member states to prioritise menstrual health within human rights agendas. We called for comprehensive health education, improved access to healthcare, and culturally sensitive approaches to break the silence surrounding menstruation. The full text of this statement is accessible at [this link](#).

Through these written submissions, we aim to provide in-depth insights and practical recommendations on critical issues affecting human rights globally. By addressing these areas, we hope to contribute to developing more inclusive, effective, and culturally sensitive human rights policies and practices.

Relevant Documents / UN documents

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

The Barcelona School of Ecological Economics and Political Ecology

Decolonizing Education for Sustainable Futures

A/HRC/57/3: Communications sent by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council from 1 March to 31 May 2024 and replies received from 1 May to 31 July 2024.

A/HRC/57/30: Impact of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights - Study of the Secretary-General.

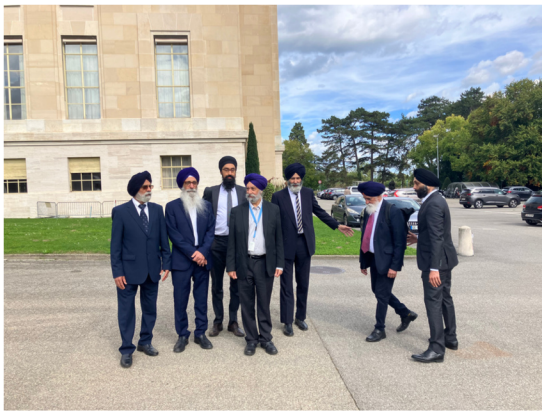
A/HRC/57/49: Report of the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order.

A/HRC/57/51: Report of the Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

A/HRC/57/60: Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights - Report of the Secretary-General

A/HRC/57/65: National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights - Report of the Secretary-General

A/HRC/57/66: Activities of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in accrediting national institutions in compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) - Report of the Secretary-General





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