

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SIKH ADVISORY BOARD FOR THE PERIOD NOVEMBER 2005 – OCTOBER 2006

Appointment of Board Members

The following members were appointed to serve on the Sikh Advisory Board (“the Board”) by the Minister for Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) for the period November 2005 to October 2007:

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Institution</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Mr Amarjit Singh | -Government Representative |
| Mr Charanjit Singh | -Paradesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan |
| Mr Darbara Singh | -Khalsa Dharmak Sabha |
| Mr Gurcharan Singh | -Khalsa Dharmak Sabha |
| Mr Harbhajan Singh | -Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha |
| Mr Habhajan Singh | -Government Representative |
| Mr Harbans Singh | -Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha |
| Mr Jagdev Singh | -Gurdwara Sahib Yishun |
| Mr Kuldip Singh | -Government Representative |
| Mr Ranjit Singh | -Sri Guru Singh Sabha |
| Mr Santa Singh | -Paradesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan |
| Mr Sarjit Singh | -Central Sikh Gurdwara Board |
| Mr Sukhbir Singh | -Sri Guru Singh Sabha |
| Mr Surjit Singh | -Government Representative |
| Mr Taranjit Singh | - Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha |

2. Meetings of the Board

The first meeting of the Board was convened on 10 November 2005. Mr Surjit Singh was elected Chairman and Mr Amarjit Singh the Secretary of the Board by the members. Thereafter, the Board resolved to meet on a quarterly basis on 7 February 2006, 2 May 2006 and 1 August 2006.

3. Role of the Board

The Board agreed at its first meeting that the general role of the Board would continue to be advisory. However, members also felt that circumstances may arise when the Board may be required to take a more active role in certain matters. Past examples of such circumstances were the Board’s role in assisting, coordinating and facilitating the setting up of the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation and the Singapore Sikh Welfare Council. In particular, it was felt that the Board should play an active role when there was strong community support for such a role. The meeting also agreed that the Board should be mindful of sensitivities and refrain from taking up issues which were within the purview and

domain of Sikh temples and institutions, unless otherwise requested by the institutions or requested by Government.

4. Meeting with Representatives of the MCYS

On 15 February 2006, the Chairman and Secretary had a luncheon meeting with Mr William Yap, the Director of Community Relations at MCYS and his senior officers, Mr Yoganathan and Ms Sheila Koh on issues of common interest such as inter-faith relations in Singapore and how the MCYS could assist the Board. One immediate outcome of this meeting was the provision to the Board by MCYS of envelopes and stationery items marked "On Government Service".

5. Appointment of Sikh representatives on National Bodies

- i. The Chairman was appointed a member of the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Racial and Religious Harmony for two years from 19 September 2006 to 18 September 2008. The function of the NSC is "to act as the national platform to steer religious and ethnic-based organizations' preparations for and response to threats that can undermine Singapore's social fabric".
- ii. The Secretary was appointed as a member of the Working Group to assist the NSC in its activities, similarly for 2 years.
- iii. Mr Karpal Singh Mehli from the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) was appointed the Sikh representative at the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle (IRHC). Mr Amarjit Singh, the Secretary of SAB was appointed the alternate representative on the IRHC.

6. Inter-Faith and Community Relation Issues

In line with the current emphasis on inter-faith and inter-racial relations, the Chairman, Secretary and some members of the Board were involved in a number of meetings and dialogue sessions with members of the other communities and religions as follows:

- i. The Chairman attended a lecture and dialogue session on "Understanding Islam" organized by the Grassroots Club on 25 January 2006.
- ii. The Secretary and Mr Darbara Singh attended, with other Sikh Community representatives, an inter-faith dialogue session organized by the Centre for Contemporary Islamic Studies PERDAUS and the Muslim's Converts Association at the Orchard Parade Hotel on 18 March 2006. The Sikh community's representatives at this session were led by Mr Karpal Singh Mehli. Apart from the representatives of the Muslim and

Sikh faiths, representatives from the Christian, Buddhist and Hindu faiths also attended the dialogue session which resolved to set up an Inter-faith task force that would handle sensitive issues on religion. The Chairman subsequently attended a follow-up meeting on 1 April 2006 in the Muslim Convert's Association premises on the setting up of the Inter-faith task force.

- iii. The Chairman and representatives from the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) attended a briefing and sharing session themed "Reaching out to the communities, especially the minorities" with Mr Mark Carol, the Director-General of the Cohesive Unit-UK Home Office on 4 April 2006. The sharing session was organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs and was held in the British Embassy premises. Mr Mark Carol was impressed with the manner in which minority issues were handled in Singapore.
- iv. The Chairman and Secretary attended a meeting with the President of the Majlis Ugama Islam (MUIS) and the Mufti of Singapore on issues pertaining to inter-religious harmony and the general state of inter-community relations on 23 May 2006. Both institutions resolved to work closely together to promote inter-religious and racial harmony.
- v. The Chairman and members of the IRO attended a luncheon meeting with Sheikh Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University in Egypt hosted by Minister, Dr Yaakob Ibrahim on 26 May 2006 at the Malay Heritage Centre. The purpose of this meeting was to give Sheikh Tantawi a glimpse of the harmonious multi-religious landscape of Singapore.
- vi. The Chairman and Secretary attended a briefing on racial and religious activities conducted by the Sikh community to representatives of the South-East CDC at the Sikh Centre on 14 June 2006. The briefing was conducted by Mr Kirpal Singh of the Sikh Centre and was also attended by the Presidents of CSGB, the Sikh Centre and Silat Road Temple.
- vii. The Chairman and members of other religious organizations attended a private meeting and reception with Cardinal Renato Martino from the Vatican on 22 June 2006 at the Shangri-La Hotel. The purpose of the meeting was to share views on inter-religious and racial harmony in Singapore with the Cardinal. The meeting was chaired by Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.
- viii. The Chairman attended the ASEM Meeting on Inter-faith Understanding & Cooperation for a Peaceful World in Larnaca, Cyprus from 3 to 5 July 2006. Three working groups discussed issues of inter-faith understanding, the role of the media in promoting inter-faith dialogue and the role of religion in multi-ethnic societies. An outcome of the meeting was the

presentation of the “Larnaca Action Plan on Interfaith Understanding and Cooperation for a peaceful world”.

7. Other Work Done by the Board

- i. The Board continued to assist Sikh institutions and the government by recommending the appointment of Sikh granthis, temple workers and licensed marriage solemnisers. A total of 27 work permit and 1 professional visit pass applications were recommended for approval by the Board between November 2005 and October 2006.
- ii. The Board assisted 360 Productions Pte Ltd in their video production of “Vesakhi” as celebrated in Singapore. One of our Board member, Mr Sukhbir Singh and his family were featured in the video which was screened on Channel News Asia in July 2006.
- iii. The Board issued a letter of support dated 14 June 2006 for IRO’s bid to host the 2009 Parliament of World Religions in Singapore.
- iv. The Board, following complaints to it by aggrieved members of the Sikh Community about an article in the 26 May 2006 issue of the locally distributed “I-S Magazine”, wrote a rebuttal to the offending article, pointing out the gravity of misrepresentation on the tenets of Sikhism in the article leading to a wrong perception of the faith. The Editor of the magazine published the rebuttal in full in the next issue of the I-S Magazine dated 23 June 2006. (A copy of the Board’s letter to the Editor is at Appendix 1.)
- v. The Board, together with Mr Bhajan Singh, Chairman of the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation assisted the Ministry of Education in reviewing and updating the Civics and Moral Education Instructional Material on Sikhism.
- vi. The Board dealt with a complaint from the next-of-kin of a Sikh inmate in Changi Prison who complained that the inmate had been pressured by a warden to convert to Christianity. The issue was taken up with the Prisons Department by the Board resulting in the Prison Officer concerned being counselled and instructed not to repeat such practices in future.
- vii. The difficulties faced by the Sikh Community in washing bodies of deceased Sikhs at the Mandai Crematorium were presented by the Board to the Ministry of Environment. The Board and the Ministry of Environment are studying the matter further.

- viii. The Board also supported and recommended approvals of several requests made by various Sikh institutions and bodies such as the Istri Sat Sang Sabha, the Singapore Khalsa Association and the Young Sikh Association for the First Lady and Government Ministers to be the Guest of Honour and grace significant events organized/celebrated by the Sikh Community.

8. **Conclusion & Acknowledgements**

- i. The current Board has found its first year of tenure to be both a fruitful and rewarding experience. The Board Members gratefully acknowledge the whole-hearted support, encouragement and cooperation given by the Sikh institutions in particular and the Sikh community in general in enabling it to perform its duties and obligations effectively.
- ii. The Board also wishes to record its appreciation to the invaluable inputs, insight and advice rendered by our Sikh Member of Parliament, Mr Inderjit Singh on matters on which the Board consulted him.
- iii. Lastly but not the least, the Board wishes to place on record the assistance, cooperation and facilitation rendered by the Officers of the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports (MCYS) in the work of the Board.

Surjit Singh
Chairman
Sikh Advisory Board

“Dear Editor, I-S Magazine

THE MINORITIES REPORT ISSUE OF 26 MAY 06

The Sikh Advisory Board (SAB), which is a Board set up by Government to advise it on matters concerning the Sikh religion and customs and general welfare of the Sikh community, thanks you for including a write-up on the Sikhs in the above issue of your magazine.

However, the article is somewhat misleading and a misinterpretation of the true Sikh doctrine, historical facts, philosophy and Sikh way of life. You have relied on the expressions and views of an individual, who is not an authority on Sikhism, to interpret our faith.

The 5 Ks were a culmination of the development of a value system as propounded by our 10 Gurus and not that of the 10th Guru alone. The 5 Ks are an integral part of this value system symbolizing righteous conduct, the search for spirituality, social responsibility, cleanliness and standing for one's legitimate rights.

The term "modern Sikh" is both meaningless and misleading. Sikhism is a modern religion having been founded in the year 1469. The distinct appearance of Sikhs is what makes one a Sikh, and the principles by which he lives his life is what makes one modern. The appearance of an individual does not make him "modern" or "traditional".

In future, if your magazine wishes to write or comment on the Sikh faith, you may wish to consult the SAB so as to avoid misleading your readers and hurting the feelings of many Sikhs.

Yours truly

Surjit Singh
Chairman, SAB”