

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SIKH ADVISORY BOARD FOR THE PERIOD NOVEMBER 2013 – OCTOBER 2014

1. Appointment of Board Members

- 1.1 The following members were appointed to the Sikh Advisory Board (SAB or Board) by the Minister for Community Development, Youth & Sports (“MCYS”) for the period from November 2013 to October 2014.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Institution</u>
Mr. Harjit Singh	Central Sikh Gurdwara Board
Mr. Pritpal Singh	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr. Sukhbir Singh	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr. Harbans Singh	Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha
Mr. Bhopinder Singh	Government Representative
Mr. Malminderjit Singh	Government Representative
Dr Narinder Kaur	Government Representative
Mr. Surjit Singh	Government Representative
Mr. Rashbar Singh	Gurdwara Sahib Yishun
Mr. Charanjit Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
Mr. Harjit Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
	(deceased October 2013)
Mr. Darshan Singh Bajaj	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr. Jaj Raj Singh Bal	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr. Ranjit Singh	Sri Guru Singh Sabha

2. Meetings of the Board

- 2.1 The Board met quarterly as scheduled on 14th January, 8th April, 1st July and 18 November 2014.

3. Major Issues Addressed by the Board

3.1 Registration of Universal Brotherhood of Mankind Society

During the year of reporting, the Board was consulted by officials from the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) on the proposed registration of the Universal Brotherhood of Mankind Society. Upon investigation, the Board determined that the society was part of the Nirankari movement that had been outlawed by the Akal Takhat in India, the supreme Sikh body in India. The SAB consulted heads of Sikh institutions in Singapore on this matter who then formulated and issued a resolution, dated 10 November 2013, urging the government not to approve the registration of the society in Singapore. The Board had been informally informed by officials from MCCY that the authorities had disallowed the registration of the society.

3.2 Upholding Religious Values and Practices

- 3.2.1 A member of the Sikh community brought to the attention of the SAB on 7 February 2014 the case of one Jasmeet Singh, a foreign national. Jasmeet Singh had complained to him that he had been advised by the agent for an established food and beverage (F&B) chain to remove his facial hair for employment with the chain or face termination. The SAB intervened and spoke to the agent who agreed that his advice was improper. Jasmeet Singh was allowed to retain his form and employment with the F&B chain.
- 3.2.2 An Indian national student in Singapore, Pavandeep Singh, had on previous occasions accused his employer and a private educational institution of forcing him to cut his hair, unlawfully expelling him from the school and other related grievances. He had regularly written to the SAB and Sikh leaders in Singapore and overseas as well as to Singapore government agencies on his grievances. In this most recent instance, he had also written to Indian authorities and the Indian High Commission in Singapore, airing his grievances. His case was taken up with the courts by a local Sikh lawyer but was unsuccessful as there was insufficient evidence to prove his allegations.
- 3.2.3 A staff member from the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) sought the help of the SAB Chairman on 18 March 2014 about a Sikh gentleman, Mr Gurdeep Singh who had gone to the hospital for ankle surgery on 10 March 2014. Unfortunately, some body hair was removed by the surgeon without him being informed about it before hand. He was visibly upset and complained that the hospital had violated his religious beliefs. The SAB with the assistance of a Sikh leader intervened and helped resolve the matter amicably. SGH acknowledged their mistake and issued him a letter of apology.
- 3.2.4 Chairman, SAB received a complaint on 10 April 2014 from the parent of one Mr Davinder Singh, a student at the Flying Training Institute that a lady supervisor had insulted and embarrassed him by making derogatory remarks about his hair and turban. Chairman SAB, immediately spoke with officials at the Institute who promptly investigated the complaint, confirmed that the supervisor had made those remarks and issued an apology in person and in writing to Davinder Singh.
- 3.2.5 The SAB had to intervene again in the course of the year of some cases where Sikh students had been instructed to remove their facial hair or to take off their “kera” (steel bangle worn by Sikhs) by their school principals or teachers. These cases, at some primary and secondary schools, were resolved amicably between SAB and the

management of the respective schools. The Sikh students were allowed to keep their facial hair and wear the “kera”.

- 3.2.6 The SAB was also alerted to a National Environment Agency (NEA) guideline on its website, which stated that to be working in the F&B sector in Singapore, one had to be clean-shaven with short hair. The Board Secretary wrote to the CEO of NEA to point out that the guideline was discriminatory in nature to Sikhs who kept their full form. The CEO acknowledged this and the particular guideline had since been removed.

3.3 Advisories Provided to Government Organizations

- 3.3.1 Ms Sharanjit Kaur from the Media Development Authority (MDA) sought the assistance of the SAB on 21st March 2014 to review a book written by Mr Parkash Singh on Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the Japji Sahib. Chairman and Secretary SAB with the assistance of a Sikh leader reviewed the book and confirmed that there were some excerpts of the book that would undermine the multi-racial and multi-religious fabric in Singapore and gave this advice to the MDA accordingly.
- 3.3.2 In their note dated 24 October 2014, MCCY sought the Board’s inputs on religious names to be reserved for the .sg domain. Besides the 2 names suggested by MCCY ie Sikh and Sikhism, the SAB also suggested the following names:
- i. Khalsa
 - ii. Gurdwara
 - iii. Sikh Temple
 - iv. Guru Granth Sahib
 - v. Waheguru
 - vi. Ek Ong Kar
- 3.3.3 The Ministry of Health was reviewing the criteria for pre-abortion counseling for pregnant women. Instead of counselling for only certain categories of pregnant women as was previously the case, the Board’s views were being sought for the counselling to be for all pregnant women. The Board replied on 5 November 2014 that it was a good move to have pre-abortion counselling for all women.

3.4 Strengthening the Sikh Community’s Processes

- 3.4.1 At the Sikh Retreat in late 2011, the idea of setting up an umbrella body of Sikh Institutions had been proposed. Due to several reasons, the Sikh leaders then decided to shelve this proposal to a later time. However, as there were some issues in recent times that had cropped

up and that did not fall within the ambit of any Sikh Institution, some leaders requested revisiting the idea of setting up an umbrella body where institutions could work together to address community-wide issues and needs. SAB members endorsed the setting up of a loose and informal forum of heads of Sikh institutions for the purposes of coordination and strategic planning for the community on 8 April 2014. It further decided that the SAB should partake in the umbrella body as an observer only and not be involved in any voting on issues that need to be taken on. This is so that there would be no conflict of interest to SAB's primary role as an advisory board to the government on all Sikh matters. Subsequently, Sikh leaders met at a meeting of Heads of Sikh Institutions in August 2014 and endorsed the setting up of the umbrella body to be named the Coordinating Council of Sikh Institutions (CCSI). Members elected Mr Gurcharan Singh, president of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) to head the CCSI for the initial term. A copy of the Terms of Reference of the CCSI is available at the SAB website, "sikhadvisoryboard.org."

- 3.4.2 Another initiative of the 2011 retreat was The Good Governance Project, where a team had been established to audit Sikh institutions on a set of good governance guidelines and in the process, also make them aware of areas they could improve on. During the period of this report, the Governance team had audited the Young Sikh Association (YSA) and the Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC). The audit scores and best practices from these organizations are posted on the SAB website.
- 3.4.3 As there was a possibility of some non-Sikhs wanting to convert to Sikhism out of their own will, the SAB with the assistance of religious leaders and teachers from the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) met and agreed on a procedure for conversions along the following lines:
- Declaration that the conversion was at the request of the person seeking it.
 - Counseling and course on understanding the religion and its practices.
 - Conversion to take place in the temple
 - Granthi Ji to do the Ardaas and take the Hukam Nama.
 - The Convert to be given an official Sikh name to be made effective by a Deed Poll.
 - Letter of conversion to be issued by the Gurdwara.
 - The CSGB to keep records of all conversions taking place in all the gurdwaras.

3.5 Participating In and Representing the Community in National Events

- 3.5.1 MCCY held an appreciation dinner on 9th January 2014 to thank members of the various communities for their efforts in contributing to Singapore's social fabric. The Ministry also took the opportunity to honour some leaders of the various communities who had served for more than 10 years at the dinner reception. Mr. Surjit Singh, Chairman SAB received the Friend of MCCY Award for his service on the Board.
- 3.5.2 Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong hosted a dinner on 9th February 2014 at the Istana to commemorate Singapore's pioneer generation, which had contributed to the nation's early development. On the request of MCCY, SAB nominated the first surviving chairman of SAB, Mr Nirmal Tej Singh Chopra to attend the function.
- 3.5.3 The Harmony Games were held on Saturday, 12th April 2014 at the Indian Association. It was organized by the Hindu Advisory Board. As in previous years, the Sikh community, led and coordinated by the SAB was well represented at the games.
- 3.5.4 Chairman and Secretary, SAB were invited separately for a lunch with the Prime Minister which was attended by other religious leaders as well. Some of the issues discussed during the lunch touched on religious, welfare, birthrate matters etc.
- 3.5.5 Secretary and Assistant Secretary SAB attended the National Day Reception on 10th August at the Istana.

3.6 Forums, Conferences, Talks

Chairman attended the following Forums, Conferences and Talks:

- Opening of the Second Session of the 12th Parliament on 16 May 2014 at the Parliament House.
- Guest of Honour at the Graduation Ceremony for Sikhism 101, 201 and Divine Reflections on 31 May 2014 at the Sikh Centre.
- The inauguration of the Studies in Inter-religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme on 9 June 2014.
- MUIS Awards and Presidential Challenge Cheque Presentation on 21 June 2014 at the Orchard Hotel.
- Dialogue session on the Regulation of Remote Gambling on 17 July 2014 at the Ministry of Social and Family Ministry.
- Guest of Honour at the SSEF Speech Day and Prize Presentation Ceremony on 26 July 2014 at the Bedok Centre.
- The Prime Minister's National Day Rally on 17 August 2014 at the ITE Auditorium in Ang Mo Kio.

- SINDA Community Forum on 30 August 2014 at the Perumal Temple Conference Hall.
- Singapore Sikh Education Foundation Teacher's Day Dinner on 6 September 2014 at the Singapore Khalsa Association.
- Abdul Aleem Siddique Memorial Lecture on Hinduism on 12 September 2014 at the Islamic Hub.
- IPS Conference on Race, Religion and Language on 9 October 2014 at the Furama Riverfront Hotel.
- Building Bridges Engagement Session on 29 October 2014 at the Islamic Hub. The theme was "Buddhist and Muslim responses to the Ecological Challenge."

3.7 Awards and Appointments

- 3.7.1 Chairman SAB was appointed as a member of the Pioneer Generation Appeals Panel on 19 May 2014 for a 2-year term.
- 3.7.2 Chairman SAB was appointed to the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony for a 3-year term starting from 15 September 2014.
- 3.7.3 Chairman SAB received a National Day award, the PBM for public service.

3.8 SAB Term of Office

SAB's term of office was extended for another 2 months to 8 December 2014 to allow more time for letters of appointments to be issued to members of the new Board.

4. **Appreciation of Support**

- 4.1 The SAB would like to thank all Sikh Institutions and community leaders, as well as members of the Sikh community for their support and cooperation during the year, without which the Board would not have been able to successfully perform its role. The Board is grateful to the CSGB for allowing SAB the use of their premises for its meetings.
- 4.2 We would also like to put on record our appreciation and thanks to MP Inderjit Singh for his advice and guidance and to the MCCY for their invaluable support.

Compiled by : Dr Narinder Kaur
 Vetted by : Mr Malminderjit Singh
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