



Human Rights and Transnational Repression Brought Into Focus at Stockton Town Hall with Congressman Josh Harder

Cases of Gurpatwant Singh Pannu (Sikhs for Justice), Gurpreet Singh Rehal (Saving Punjab), Avtar Singh Khanda, and the Assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar Highlighted

Stockton, California — January 29

At a town-hall-style meet-and-greet held at the Sikh Gurdwara in Stockton, representatives of the Sikh American community raised concerns about the impact of current U.S. domestic policies on immigrants, Sikh truck drivers, asylees, and their families. Several Sikhs who had previously been detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) shared their experiences directly with Congressman Josh Harder. Issues related to California commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) were also discussed.

Broader international concerns, including human rights, religious freedom, and allegations of transnational repression affecting Sikhs and other minority communities in Western countries, were brought to the congressman's attention. During the meeting, Bhajan Singh Bhinder, representing the Sikh Information Center, delivered a formal statement calling for principled engagement and a reassessment of U.S. foreign policy toward India.

Bhinder highlighted several cases of transnational repression:

- Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, a U.S. citizen who advocated for secession from India through a peaceful referendum, was the target of an assassination plot that U.S. authorities ultimately prevented.
- Gurpreet Singh Rehal, a United Kingdom-based environmental advocate focused on protecting Punjab, was arrested in the U.K. The Indian government has presented many trumped-up charges, similar to the case of Jaggi Johal.
- Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an advocate for Sikh self-determination, was assassinated on June 18, 2023, in British Columbia, Canada. Reports of the Indian state hiring known gangsters such as Lawrence Bishnoi have raised concerns about intimidation affecting communities in America, Canada, and around the world.
- Avtar Singh Khanda, a U.K.-based Sikh activist, is believed by some observers to have died under circumstances involving poisoning.

Bhinder emphasized that Sikh Americans look to their elected representatives for principled leadership and moral clarity. He framed the community's concerns within the founding principles of the United States—particularly the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

At the gathering, Bishop Joshua Lickter (Assembly for Human Rights) also addressed the congressman, speaking about his own experiences with transnational repression and the personal challenges he has faced for advocating on behalf of minority communities in India. He highlighted ongoing concerns about the treatment of religious minorities—especially Christians, Sikhs, and Dalits—and underscored the importance of solidarity, faith, and continued international attention to human rights and religious freedom.

The Sikh Information Center expressed its readiness to provide documentation, survivor testimonies, and policy recommendations to congressional and federal offices in support of constructive, peaceful, and democratic solutions. Bhinder concluded by reaffirming faith in democratic dialogue and in the United States' enduring commitment to justice, stressing that the protection of human rights must extend beyond borders and remain central to American foreign policy and global leadership.

Community leaders also thanked Congressman Harder for engaging directly with constituents and providing an open forum to hear concerns affecting immigrant and minority communities.

– Sikh Information Center