

January 29, 2016

To: Law Enforcement Agency

**RE: Uptick in Hate Crimes / Violence Against Sikh Americans**

The Sikh Coalition,<sup>1</sup> the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the United States, writes to bring to your attention the recent increase in hate crimes, including bias-based attacks and vandalism, against Sikh Americans across the country and to request your vigilance and partnership during this difficult time.

As you may be aware, the Sikh American community is facing a sharp uptick in hate crimes, violence, hate speech, and profiling following the terrorist attacks in Paris, France and San Bernardino, California. Relative to other vulnerable minorities, Sikhs are disproportionately targeted for discrimination because they wear turbans and maintain unshorn hair (including facial hair) in accordance with their faith. (Punjabi Sikhs are also vulnerable because of their South Asian ancestry, i.e. racial appearance.) As you may know, Sikhs were also the victims of hundreds of bias-motivated crimes in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

The discrimination is sometimes based upon a mistaken perception that Sikhs are affiliated with Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, or the Taliban. However, Sikh Americans have also been the specific targets of hate crimes, as in the 2012 Oak Creek, Wisconsin tragedy, when a neo-Nazi walked into a Sikh house of worship and killed six Sikh worshippers and injured several others, including decorated police officer Lt. Brian Murphy.<sup>2</sup>

In the past two months alone, a number of apparent hate crimes have been committed against Sikhs, including the shooting of a Sikh liquor store clerk in Grand Rapids, Michigan after the perpetrator called him a “terrorist”; an attack targeting the turban of an elderly Sikh grandfather in Bakersfield, California; vandalism of a Sikh house of worship with “ISIS” graffiti in Buena Park, California; the brutal assault of a L.A. County Sikh bus driver by a passenger who referred to him as a “suicide bomber” and “terrorist”; the vicious beating of an elderly Sikh farmworker in Fresno, California by two assailants in a vehicle; and the fatal stabbing of a Sikh convenience store clerk, also in Fresno, California.<sup>3</sup> Earlier in the year, in

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<sup>1</sup> By way of background, Sikhism is a monotheistic religion originating from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. Sikhs have lived in the United States for over a century, and they are religiously mandated to maintain turbans and unshorn hair, including beards for men. These articles of faith are of immense significance, and remind a Sikh of his or her duty to maintain and uphold the core beliefs of the Sikh faith, which include working hard, honesty, sharing with the needy, and promoting the equality of all humankind.

<sup>2</sup> See Steven Yaccino, Michael Schwartz and Marc Santora, *Gunman Kills 6 at a Sikh Temple*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 5, 2012), [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/us/shooting-reported-at-temple-in-wisconsin.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/us/shooting-reported-at-temple-in-wisconsin.html?_r=0).

<sup>3</sup> See John Agar, *Robber Called Store Clerk “Terrorist” Before Shooting him in Face, Worker Says*, GRAND RAPIDS PRESS (Dec. 14, 2015), [http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/12/robber\\_called\\_store\\_clerk\\_terr.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/12/robber_called_store_clerk_terr.html); Sikh Coalition Advisory, “Potential Hate

September 2015, Inderjit S. Mukker, a Sikh father of two, was viciously beaten in Darien, Illinois, after his attacker called him racial slurs including “Bin Laden” and told him to “go back to his country.” The attacker was charged with and pleaded guilty to a hate crime.<sup>4</sup>

In these troubling times, we respectfully request law enforcement’s vigilance and urgency in identifying, investigating and responding to hate crimes and backlash against vulnerable communities, including Sikhs, Muslims, Arabs, Syrians, and South Asians. We also ask members of law enforcement to reach out to local Sikh community leaders, including at Sikh gurdwaras (houses of worship), to engage in community outreach and to share resources about hate crime prevention and reporting. We believe these efforts are critical in protecting our community.<sup>5</sup>

Thank you for your dedication to protecting and serving all Americans, including Sikh Americans and all victims of hate crimes. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding Sikhs, Sikhism, or the issues faced by Sikh Americans. In addition, please visit our website ([www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)) for a wealth of information about the Sikh community, and see attached enclosure on Sikhs and Sikhism.

Respectfully,

*s/ Sapreet Kaur*

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*Crime Against Sikh Grandfather,*” (Dec. 16, 2015), <http://sikhcoalition.org/advisories/2015/potential-hate-crime-against-sikh-grandfather>; Liam Stack, *Hate Crime Inquiry Opened in Vandalism of Sikh Temple in California*, NEW YORK TIMES (Dec. 9, 2015), [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/us/hate-crime-inquiry-opened-into-vandalism-of-sikh-temple-in-california.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/us/hate-crime-inquiry-opened-into-vandalism-of-sikh-temple-in-california.html?_r=0); Brittny Mejia, *Attack on L.A. Metro Driver Sparks Fear in Sikh Community*, THE L.A. TIMES (Jan. 14, 2016), <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-attack-on-metro-driver-sparks-fear-in-sikh-community-20160114-story.html>; Editorial, *We Are All Amrik S. Bal*, THE FRESNO BEE, (Dec. 29, 2015), <http://www.fresnobee.com/opinion/editorials/article52104160.html>; Jim Guy, *Hate Crime Not Ruled Out in Fresno Slaying of Sikh Store Clerk*, THE FRESNO BEE (Jan 6., 2016), <http://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/crime/article53423305.html>.

<sup>4</sup> See Kimberly Fornek, *Willowbrook Teen Pleads Guilty to Hate Crime in Attack on Sikh Driver*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE (Dec. 15, 2015), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/burr-ridge/news/ct-dbr-sikh-hate-crime-guilty-plea-tl-1217-20151215-story.html>; Sikh Coalition, *“Hundreds Rally to Combat Hate After Sikh Assault in Chicago”* (Sept. 15, 2015), <http://sikhcoalition.org/advisories/2015/hundreds-rally-to-combat-hate-after-sikh-assault-in-chicago>.

<sup>5</sup> Additional strategies for building stronger relationships with minority communities may include cultural sensitivity trainings for law enforcement and hiring personnel, including officers, from minority communities. See National Crime Prevention Council, *Strategy: Raising Cultural Awareness*, available at <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/hate-crime/strategies/strategy-raising-cultural-awareness>.

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[Enclosure Attached]