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To transform underprivileged and minority communities and individuals into informed and vibrant members of society through civic, educational and personal development programmes.

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6th September 2009

Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
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Dear Mr Balls MP

We write on behalf of the parents of 14 year old J Singh and representatives of the UK Sikh community to express our deepest regrets about The Compton School's decision to ban the Kirpan. This ban undermines religious freedom and calls into question the school's commitment to provide an education to all students equally. The Compton school's decision is expressed in their letters attached, dated 17th July and 3rd September.

We seek your urgent intervention to uphold Parliament's decision to protect religious freedom in schools and your Department's legal duty to ensure that J's education is not disrupted when school reopens on Monday 7th September, as he is within the compulsory education age group.

We seek a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to raise the issues fully.

The Compton School has refused to allow 14 year old J to wear a Kirpan to school that he, as an initiated Sikh, is religiously mandated to do, even though he has been allowed to wear the Kirpan to school for the last 2 years. Instead the school has suggested he wears a replica, which is not a Kirpan.

The school says that it will turn J away from the school gates, when it reopens on 7th September 2009, if he is wearing a Kirpan. Further, the school says that it does not have a duty to provide J with education thereafter.

We have written to remind the school that J will be turned away from school on 7th September through no fault of his but because his conscience mandates that he upholds his religious tenets. We have asked the school that if it believes it has acted in the interest of the rest of the students how does the school propose to act in the interest of J? The rules of natural justice dictate that justice is not about numbers and that each individual should have equal access to justice.

The UK Parliament has legislated for Sikhs to be allowed to wear the Kirpan and the school has a duty to ensure that its concerns for health and safety for all students are met in a way that is proportionate to the risk posed by a Kirpan.

We are aware that the school accepts that J will not misuse his Kirpan but we regret that the school has not taken the view that is taken all over the country and abroad that there has been no known incident involving a Kirpan in schools in the UK and that worn properly it cannot fall into wrong hands any more than any other sharp object that is commonly found in a school for e.g. scissors, blades, cutters or cutlery. Why is the Kirpan seen as a greater risk by the school than the greater number of scissors, cutters, tools and sports equipment that are easily accessible in school?

We are disturbed that the school does not recognize its responsibility to provide J with an education after he is turned away from school through no fault of his but because he wishes to practise his faith. The school has said alternative arrangements would have to be made for J's education without saying what the arrangements are.

Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England (1874-1965), while speaking in the British Parliament during a debate on whether to allow Sikhs an exemption from wearing a helmet, when safety was raised as an issue, said:

".....It is a matter of regret that due to the obsession of the present times people are distorting the superior religious and social values, but those who wish to preserve them with respect, we should appreciate them as well as help them. Sikhs do need our help for such a cause and we should give it happily. Those who know the Sikh history, know England's relationship with the Sikhs and are aware of the achievements of the Sikhs, they should persistently support the idea of relaxation to Sikhs to ride a motorbike with their turbans on, because it is their religious privilege."

Churchill, further added, "...British people are highly indebted and obliged to Sikhs for a long time. I know that within this century we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result of their timely help, we are today able to live with honour, dignity, and independence. In the war, they fought and died for us, wearing the turbans. At that time we were not adamant that they should wear safety helmets because we knew that they are not going to wear them anyway and we would be

deprived of their help. At that time due to our miserable and poor situation, we did not force it on them to wear safety helmets, why should we force it now? Rather, we should now respect their traditions and by granting this legitimate concession, win their applaud."

We support J's right to obtain a full education whilst practicing his faith. We are aware that he is a bright student with a lot of potential to serve society.

We hope that you will meet the school's governing board to persuade it to review its decision to ensure that the school carries out its duty to society in a way that allows diversity to operate in order to prepare good citizens for this country and the world.

Yours Truly

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Sikh Gurdwaras

1. Fishponds Gurdwara, Bristol
2. Gurdwara Dasmesh Darbar East Ham
3. Gurdwara Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji Tividale
4. Gurdwara Singh Sabha East London
5. Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Wednesfield)
6. Guru Nanak Gurdwara Bedford
7. Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick
8. Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Gravesend
9. Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Sedgley Street (Wolverhampton)
10. Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Willenhall
11. Guru Teg Bahadur Gurdwara, Leicester
12. Nanak Darbar (North London)
13. Nanaksar Gurdwara, Pleck
14. Nanaksar Thaath Isher Darbar (Wolverhampton)
15. Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Slough
16. St George's Gurdwara, Bristol
17. Telford Gurdwara Saahib
18. The Sikh Temple – Leeds

Sikh organisations

1. Akaal S.E.V.A (Bedford)
2. Akash Radio
3. Awaze Qaum International
4. Khalsa Human Rights
5. Khalsa Satsang, Southampton
6. National Sikh Resource Centre
7. Nirvair Khalsa Dal (UK)
8. Sikh Arts and Cultural Association
9. Sikh Community Action Network (SCAN)
10. Sikh Recreation Learning Centre, Walsall
11. Sikh Resource Centre, Bristol
12. Sikh Secretariat
13. Sikh Womens Federation
14. Walsall Sikh Forum
15. Young Sikhs (UK)
16. Sikh Seva (Youth Organisation)
17. British Organisation of Sikh Students