

Press Embargo until after the hearing ends on 17 Nov 2005

Testimony of Mohinder Singh before the New York City Council's Civil Service and Labour Committee

Mohinder Singh

Chairman of Board of Trustees of The Sikh Center, Member of American Sikh Consultative Forum

Good afternoon Chairman ,Joseph Addabbo, Council Member David Weprin who introduced Uniform an Anti-Discrimination Bill, Council Members of the Civil Service and Labour Committee, members of the Sikh community and the public at large present at this hearing. I thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

My name is Mohinder Singh, and I am member of the Sikh community Flushing. My concern today is to express the importance of the Intro 577 bill. My concern today is based on the choice tomorrow my children would have to make while deciding on a profession they have to undertake.

Sikhs are more than 100,000 in number living in New York City and cover all your constituencies. We are voters that participate in the election system to elect the council members. Sikhs have been living in the great United States of America from past 100 years. They came in to work as farmers in the West coast and essentially, the Sikhs in America constitute in every major field, be it the sciences or the arts.

I, on behalf of the Sikh community seek support on this bill from the council members. Your support on this bill will not make a Sikh decide or take a decision on whether he or she has to give up her religious practices in order to work in NYPD or in any city agency where they have to compromise on giving up their identity which is a god given sovereign right, mainly the keeping of hair, beard and the Kesh and wearing a turban (dastaar).

This bill is diverse in its nature and not only talks about the Sikhs but also about members of other faiths. Identity is not just about external expressions but also a resolve to stand up for truth and justice. Sikhs in their history have proven this since ages. More than 200,000 Sikhs gave up their lives in World War I and II while wearing their turbans (dastaar).

Uday Singh, 21, a fallen hero of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Illinois served his country the United States of America and died on Dec 1 2003 of injuries sustained when enemy forces. He did served his country with his life but even Uday Singh had to give up his identity to be in the army. Our upcoming generations would be forced to do something similar. Please do not let this happen. The strength of a Sikh lays in the message behind his identity, the turban (dastaar) being one of them, a mark of royalty, freedom and justice which is what America stands for.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify.