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development programmes.*

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22nd Oct 2009

Sir Michael Lyons
Chairman of the BBC Trust

cc

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cc: Indarjit Singh, Network of Sikh Organisations
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Harmander Singh, Chair, National Sikh Security Forum

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Dear Sir Michael

Re: The Sikh Community Condemns the BBC's Irresponsible Use of the Khanda, a Sikh Religious Insignia

The Sikh community was very shocked and saddened by a BBC news report, on Friday 16th Oct 2009, about a Sikh rape victim from Wales, who had suffered prolonged abuse at the hands of those she would expect to be protected by, especially from such a young age.

It was therefore a double blow for the Sikh community when they saw the irresponsible use, by the BBC in the same news report, of a Sikh religious insignia, the Khanda, and the suggestion that the Sikh religion was connected to the crimes.

The report had 'victimised' the entire Sikh community when the BBC used the Khanda, a Sikh religious insignia, no less significant than the Cross, e.g. when they showed the convicted men whose faces were darkened to protect the identity of the rape victim.

Further, the report, by innuendo, maligned the Sikh community as it made references to the Sikh religion, which had no relevance to the rape incidents. The community felt as though the reporter was trying to link the Sikh religion to the incidents.

The Khanda is a sacred symbol that symbolizes eternity and righteousness and is commonly seen at Sikh Gurdwaras and on the Sikh flag- the Nishaan Sahib.

On seeing the Khanda used in the above-mentioned way, the Sikh community immediately started a national 'text' campaign urging the community to contact the BBC to cause the removal of the Khanda from the news item.

UNITED SIKHS, an international charity that advocates for the civil and human rights of minorities, urges the BBC to conduct an immediate investigation and answer the following questions so that we may address the Sikh community's concerns:

1. What, if any, checks did the BBC news reporter and producer make to ascertain the nature and significance of the Khanda to the Sikh community, before it was used?
2. What was the reason for using the Khanda in the report? Have you have used the Cross or the Crescent and Star whenever you report on Christians and Muslims committing offences?
3. Why was it necessary to mention the Sikh religion in a crime report and why did the producer allow the link?
4. What training does the BBC provide its staff to familiarise them with religious insignia so that there is no abuse that could lead to community tensions?
5. Does the BBC accept that the irresponsible use of the Khanda in the said news report could increase community tension and that it can lead to incitement of religious hatred?
6. What measures will be taken to appease the Sikh community so that the said report, is not misconstrued by the Sikh community as a deliberate attempt to insult them?

7. Will the BBC produce specific positive documentaries on the Sikh faith to mitigate the effect of the insulting use of the Khanda and the insulting link of the crimes to the Sikh religion?
8. How will the BBC ensure that this and such incidents do not recur?
9. Is the BBC prepared to publically apologise to the Sikh community, without parading the offending news item to ensure that the rape victim would not have to relive the memory of the report nor that the Sikh community would be insulted again?

We have a recording of the said news report and we seek an urgent meeting with you to go through the first edition of the report to establish the cause of the problem and to find solutions.

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Legal Director

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