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Re: Detention of Sikh Political Activists Daljit Singh Bittu and Kulbir Singh Barapind.  
Sub: Declare them "Prisoners of Conscience (POC)" and issue an "APPEAL" for their release.

Dear Sir/Madam:

Today, we write to seek your attention and support on the issue of recent wave of terror and crackdown by the Indian government against Sikh political and human rights activists.

Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) is a human rights organization which believes and adheres to Universal Declaration of Human Rights. SFJ endeavors to create an environment in which minorities - regardless of race, religion, language, gender, or ethnicity – can freely exercise their right to "self determination" as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. SFJ is also striving to collect and disseminate information, statistics, figures and data regarding the Genocide of Sikhs (1984-98) that took place in India.

On September 19, police illegally detained two prominent Sikh political activists Daljit Singh Bittu of Akali Dal Panch Pardhani and Kulbir Singh Barapind President Akali Dal Panch Pardhani and member of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) who were democratically campaigning for justice, amendment to Article 25 of the Constitution of India and Sikhs' right to "self determination". Later, both the leaders were booked on the trumped up charges of "waging war against the country" and for having links through FaceBook with foreign based Sikh secessionists, as per the police briefings to the press.

Previously Government of India has miserably failed to prove similar charges of sedition and militancy against both these individuals. Kulbir Singh Barapind was charged with more than dozen cases and was extradited from the United States to India on those charges. Barapind spent more than a decade in continuous detention in USA and India and was finally acquitted by the court in all the cases. Similarly Daljit Singh Bittu spent more than 10 years in detention and was finally acquitted by the court in all the cases. The previous exoneration of Barapind and Bittu from the all the charges related to militancy proves that they were punished by filing of frivolous charges for holding political beliefs in dissent of the Government of India.

The head office of the Akali Dal Panch Pardhani has also been sealed and records have been confiscated by the police. This recent wave of detention and filing of false charges against the Sikh political activists is in retaliation to their vocal support for justice, right to self determination and demand to amend Article 25 of the Constitution of India to restore the separate status of Sikhism. Article 25 of the Constitution lumps Sikhism, an independent religion, with Hinduism and usurps the separate religious identity of Sikhs.

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A review of the charges filed against these political and human rights activists makes it evident that India is attempting to equate the demanding of justice, separate status for Sikhism and "right to self determination" with "extremism" and supporting "terrorism". This is being done in order to gain sympathy and support of western democracies and to tarnish the image of peace loving Sikh community across Europe and North America.

The recent actions of Indian government against the human rights and political activists are utterly undemocratic and violate every norm of democracy, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International laws. If the current wave of implicating political activists in the name of curbing "terrorism" goes unchecked, it will result in another era of torture, illegal detentions, enforced disappearances and extra judicial killings of Sikhs, a religious minority, as it happened to them during 1984-98 which has been extensively documented by the Amnesty International.

We, therefore, urge you to:

- DECLARE Daljit Singh Bittu and Kulbir Singh Barapind as "Prisoners of Conscience (POC)" for their arrest and prosecution based on political views and non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs;
- ISSUE an Appeal for release of Daljit Singh Bittu and Kulbir Singh Barapind;
- CONDEMN India's recent crackdown on Sikh political and human rights to suppress the popular demand for justice, amendment to Article 25 of the Constitution and right to self determination.

Sincerely yours



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