



City Acknowledges Mistake and Returns Gurudwara President's Kirpan

June 3, 2008 (New York, NY) - The City of New York has agreed to return a kirpan that it had confiscated from Himat Singh, President of the Sikh Center of New York gurudwara in Flushing, Queens. The city agreed to do so within hours after the Sikh Coalition raised the matter with city officials.

I am thankful the Coalition helped me work with the Department to get my kirpan back. Thank you Sikh Coalition.

Himat Singh
*President, Sikh Center of New York
Gurudwara*

Himat Singh Travels to Manhattan to Submit Gurudwara Construction Plans

Himat Singh is the president of Sikh Center of New York, a Sikh gurudwara (house of worship) in Flushing, Queens. On Tuesday May 27, 2008, Mr. Singh traveled to Manhattan to submit plans to the city Department of Buildings regarding construction of an extension of the gurudwara. In order to enter the Department of Buildings, he was subject to search.

The security guards told him that he could not carry his religiously-mandated kirpan into the building because the blade was longer than four inches. Mr. Singh relinquished his kirpan in order to enter the building and submit the construction plans to the city. However, when he returned to the security checkpoint, the guards refused to return his kirpan to him.

Mr. Singh immediately contacted the Sikh Coalition during the afternoon the same day and asked for assistance.

The Coalition Takes Action

The Sikh Coalition immediately drafted a letter to the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Buildings. In its letter, the Coalition explained that NYC Code § 10-133 bans knives with blade lengths of four or more inches. However, courts and prosecutors around the country and in New York City have without exception respected the First Amendment right of Sikhs to practice their religion by carrying the kirpan. For example, in [People v. Singh](#), the sole reported case of a kirpan prosecution in New York City, the court dismissed charges against a Sikh clergyman for carrying a kirpan, purportedly in violation of NYC Code § 10-133.

The Coalition sent the letter to the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Buildings on the morning of Wednesday, May 28, 2008. Simultaneously, the Coalition contacted Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office, and spoke to a member of the Community Affairs Unit. Within hours, the City of New York agreed to return Himat Singh's kirpan to him.

Work Does Not Stop Here

The Coalition is continuing discussions with the Mayor's Office to ensure that Sikhs' rights to carry their kirpans in New York City are not infringed in city buildings in the future. We also urge the City to train its security guard workforce about Sikhs and Sikh practices to ensure they respect a Sikhs' right to carry their kirpan.

The Sikh Coalition commends the City of New York for quickly recognizing and rectifying its mistake. We thank the Mayor's Office for its support in this matter. The Coalition also commends Himat Singh for standing up for his right to carry his kirpan.

We urge all Sikhs to practice their faith fearlessly. If someone tells you to remove your articles of faith, please contact us [here](#).

The Sikh Coalition is a community-based organization that works for the realization of civil and human rights for all people. The Coalition serves as a resource on Sikhs and Sikh concerns for government, organizations and individuals.

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