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Bill 33

An Act to proclaim Sikh Genocide Awareness Week

Mr. G. Singh

Private Member's Bill

1st Reading October 26, 2021

2nd Reading

3rd Reading

Royal Assent



EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill proclaims the first seven days of November in each year as Sikh Genocide Awareness Week.

An Act to proclaim Sikh Genocide Awareness Week

Preamble

Ontario is home to a dynamic and vibrant Sikh community and one of the largest Sikh populations outside of South Asia. The Sikh community has deep roots in Ontario and plays a vital role in strengthening our province's social, political and economic fabric.

Despite thriving and contributing as a community in Ontario and globally, Sikhs are still impacted by the genocide and other atrocity crimes perpetrated by the Government of India. These crimes have caused ongoing physical and mental trauma, as well as intergenerational trauma. These traumas are intensified by India's entrenched culture of impunity, its refusal to hold the perpetrators accountable or even acknowledge its crimes and the denial of reparations.

There is a long history of the Indian government discriminating against Sikhs and perpetrating gross human rights violations against them and other minorities. Atrocities against Sikhs intensified most notably in June 1984, when India's armed forces, upon orders from prime minister Indira Gandhi, launched Operation Blue Star, a continuous, nearly week-long military attack on Sikhs in the Harmandir Sahib (popularly known as the Golden Temple), the Akal Takht Sahib, their surrounding complexes and over 70 other Gurdwaras across Punjab. During Operation Blue Star, the government sealed Punjab's borders and imposed a media blackout, evicting foreign journalists and censoring all reporting. The impact of this total assault was devastating, with security forces killing thousands of Sikhs and destroying major Sikh heritage sites and artifacts, including serious damage to Gurdwaras and the destruction of rare documents and manuscripts. This destruction included the demolition of the Akal Takht Sahib, a major Sikh religious institution, and the burning and looting of the Sikh Reference Library, resulting in the loss of irreplaceable historical resources.

Shortly afterwards in November 1984, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the state orchestrated genocidal killings of thousands of Sikhs throughout India and, in particular, its capital, Delhi. Relying on voter registration lists and property records as part of a premeditated plan to identify their victims, state-organized mobs ruthlessly targeted Sikhs, committing horrific violence, including dousing Sikhs in kerosene and other combustible chemicals, placing tires around their necks, and setting them on fire. State-organized mobs also perpetrated extreme sexual violence against Sikh women, detaining many against their will for days. Further, state-organized mobs destroyed Sikhs' businesses, homes, and places of worship, displacing thousands. Throughout this carnage, police and politicians aided the mobs by directing them towards Sikhs and by directly participating in the violence.

Following these genocidal acts, India's security forces further subjected Sikhs to a widespread and systematic campaign of torture, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances, in Punjab and other states, that lasted well over a decade. The late Jaswant Singh Khalra (recognized as a defender of human rights by Amnesty International) exposed thousands of incidents of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and secret mass cremations of Sikhs. His work, based on government records, demonstrates that security forces perpetrated gross human rights violations that were both widespread, having occurred throughout Punjab, and systematic, having targeted the Sikh population.

The widespread and systematic enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and secret mass cremations of Sikhs in Punjab and beyond amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

These atrocity crimes, alongside the attacks of June 1984 and the November 1984 Sikh genocide, speak to a larger and persistent campaign of genocide against Sikhs by the state of India.

Acknowledging this genocide is a significant first step in community healing. By recognizing these international crimes, we demonstrate our collective commitment to pursuing a world characterized by our shared and universal values of truth, justice and respect for human rights in order to prevent such genocides, crimes against humanity and other atrocity crimes from recurring.

Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

Sikh Genocide Awareness Week

1 (1) The first seven days of November in each year are proclaimed as Sikh Genocide Awareness Week.

Same

(2) During that week, all Ontarians are encouraged to educate themselves and reflect on, as well as create awareness of, the Sikh genocide and other genocides that have occurred throughout the world.

Commencement

2 This Act comes into force on the day it receives Royal Assent.

Short title

3 The short title of this Act is the *Sikh Genocide Awareness Week Act, 2021*.