



# NEWS



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## FIRST SIKHS ELECTED IN NEW YORK

### New Officials Pledge to Tackle Prejudice with Political Clout

**New York, NY** – Leaders of the Sikh community and city officials joined together today at Borough Hall in Queens to announce the first-ever election of Sikhs in New York. The five individuals – Harjinder Singh Duggal, Dhan Singh, Gurmej Singh, Mohinder Singh, and Harpreet Singh Wahan – were elected to the Queens Democratic County Committee in last week’s Primary Election. They will attend their first meeting of the Queens County Committee tonight, representing their communities in Flushing, Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park.

“Since 9/11, Sikhs have lived in constant fear of hate crimes and discrimination. Sikhs have been branded as terrorists because we wear turbans,” said **Amardeep Singh Legal Director of the Sikh Coalition**. “The election of Sikhs in New York signals a new era where Sikhs can proactively raise awareness and fight prejudice with our political clout.”

The road to election was not easy for the five Sikh candidates. The candidates had to confront prejudice first-hand as they went door-to-door gathering signatures to get their name on the ballot. “In the beginning, I was concerned about knocking on people’s doors to ask for their vote,” said **Mohinder Singh**. “Some people saw me and told me to go away. But by the end, people were approaching me to talk about issues.”

“New York City is home to 55,000 Sikhs. Worldwide, there are 25 million Sikhs. We have the fifth largest religion in the world yet Sikhs remain misunderstood and are targets of discrimination because of the way we look and the clothes we wear,” said **Harjinder Singh Duggal**.

All five Sikhs also faced technical challenges to their candidacy from the New York City Board of Elections. With the help of Grassroots Initiative, a local nonprofit organization that assists first-time candidates for elected office, the Sikhs were able to fight these challenges in the New York Supreme Court and all five candidates were returned to the ballot.

“New York is a city of immigrants and communities like the Sikhs have a vital role to play in the political process. I hope that the Sikhs will be role models for the hundreds of ethnic communities in this great city who have been disenfranchised from the political process for far too long,” said **Jeff S. Merritt, President of Grassroots Initiative.**

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**Grassroots Initiative** is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization committed to rebuilding democracy by opening doors, breaking down barriers and establishing effective dialogue between community residents and public decision makers. Grassroots Initiative promotes community involvement, assists first-time candidates for public office and enables decision makers to better utilize public input. For more information, please visit [www.gograssroots.org](http://www.gograssroots.org).

Started as an effort to educate the greater North American community on Sikhs and Sikhism, the **Sikh Coalition** works to safeguard the civil and human rights of all people and communicate the collective interests of Sikhs to civil society. The Coalition serves as a resource on Sikhs and Sikh concerns for governments, organizations and individuals. For more information, please visit [www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org).