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NEWS

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NEW PHOTO EXHIBIT TELLS STORY OF FIRST-ELECTED SIKHS IN NEW YORK

Month-long Exhibit at Queens Museum of Art Opens March 3rd

New York, NY – Grassroots Initiative, the Sikh Coalition and Queens Museum of Art opened the doors today for the first public showing of *Fighting Prejudice with Votes: Sikhs in New York* – a bold, new photography exhibit documenting the first-ever elected Sikhs in New York.

City Council Member John C. Liu, who in 2001 became the first Asian American to be elected to the New York City Council, spoke at the opening event, alongside **Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares**, **Chair of the Taxi and Limousine Commission Matthew Daus**, and other distinguished guests.

"Our democracy is only as great as it is inclusive," stated **Council Member Liu**. "By this measure, the Sikh community's willingness to engage our political institutions in the struggle for collective survival and empowerment has contributed enormously to America's movement towards a democratic and just society. We welcome the Sikh pioneers who have successfully entered the political arena and who are now building a path for the hundreds of others seeking to follow in their footsteps."

In 2006, Grassroots Initiative partnered with the nation's leading Sikh civil and human rights organization, the Sikh Coalition, to help elect the first-ever Sikh elected officials in New York. Five individuals – **Harjinder Duggal**, **Dhan Singh**, **Gurmej Singh**, **Mohinder Singh** and **Harpreet Wahan Singh** – were elected to the Queens County Democratic Committee.

In *Fighting Prejudice with Votes*, Brooklyn-based photographer Sarah Tew documents this experience in images, juxtaposing the private and public lives of the Sikh community and the process of merging these lives through entry into the political process. The images provide an intimate look into the culture, faith and recent triumphs of one of New York's most colorful and least understood ethnic communities.



“Fighting Prejudice with Votes is not just about pretty pictures,” said **Jeff S. Merritt, President of Grassroots Initiative**. “The exhibition showcases and celebrates the entrance of new immigrant, ethnic, and traditionally marginalized groups into elected office. The groups and individuals at the focus of this exhibition demonstrate that discrimination, stigma and political barriers can be overcome. They are trailblazers who remind us what democracy is, and should be, all about.”

“In a city as diverse as New York, having elected officials from as wide an array of ethnic backgrounds as the constituents they serve is an important and reachable goal. The Sikh community should be very proud of the tremendous progress they have made towards becoming a force in the City's political process. I congratulate those members of the Sikh community who have already achieved the status of elected official and I look forward to the very near day when more will join in their accomplishment,” said **New York City Council Finance Chair David Weprin**.

Amardeep Singh, Director of the Sikh Coalition, further highlighted the optimism in the Sikh Community noting, “Rather than merely fighting lawsuits and combatting discrimination after the fact, we’re excited about the prospect of proactively fighting discrimination and challenging stereotypes. This exhibit showcases a major step in that direction.”

Mohinder Singh, one of the newly elected Sikh officials, agreed. “In the beginning, I was concerned about knocking on people’s doors to ask for their vote,” he said. “Some people saw me and told me to go away. But by the end, people were approaching me to talk about issues. It’s a great feeling.”

Fighting Prejudice with Votes will be on view at the Queens Museum of Art from March 3rd – March 31st. For more information, please visit www.FightingPrejudice.com.

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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.

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.

The **Queens Museum of Art** was established in 1972 to provide a vital cultural center in Flushing Meadows Corona Park for the borough’s unique, international population. Today it is home to the Panorama of the City of New York, a 9,335 square foot scale model of the five boroughs, and features temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art that reflect the cultural diversity of Queens. For general visitor information, please visit the Museum’s website www.queensmuseum.org or call 718.592.9700.