

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden,
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

September 20, 2023

Re: The Alleged Indian State Sponsored Murder of Canadian Sikh Mr. Hardeep Singh Nijjar

Dear President Biden:

The Sikh American community is extremely concerned about the announcement by the Canadian government regarding the alleged involvement of the Indian government in the death of Canadian Sikh leader, Mr. Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The Sikh American community encourages you to take action in holding the Indian government accountable. If these allegations are true, as many in the Sikh community around the globe believe, it represents a serious breach of international norms, respect for core freedoms, and fits into a documented pattern of the Indian state actions towards minority and dissenting voices.

Mr. Nijjar was a prominent and vocal critic of the Indian state, the Modi government, and was organizing a public referendum on the establishment of a separate Sikh state. As an active member of the Canadian Sikh community, he was exercising his right to free speech as a Canadian citizen.

Unfortunately, the Indian government's record on human rights and freedom of speech does not live up to the expectations of the world's largest democracy. The State Department has stated in its recent 2022 Human Rights Report that there are credible reports of unlawful and arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government, and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic and minority groups based on religious affiliation, social status or sexual orientation¹

In recent years human rights organizations, notably Human Rights Watch, have documented numerous abuses including India's crackdown on civil society and the media. The Indian government prosecutes activists, journalists, peaceful protesters, and other critics on fabricated counterterrorism and hate speech laws. They have shut down rights groups using foreign funding regulations or unfounded allegations

¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/india>

of financial irregularities. The government has adopted laws and policies that discriminate against religious minorities, especially Muslims.²

These actions are not limited to within India. SALDEF has documented multiple cases of Sikh and minority voices throughout the Indian diaspora being actively censored online. SALDEF highlighted that India is increasing its control of the free and open internet. The longstanding practice of using virtual private networks (VPNs) has been compromised in India. Historically, individuals could use a VPN to access their online content from India to see if it was blocked and, if so, determine appropriate domain names under which they could re-publish. From 2022 onward, industry leading VPN products like NordVPN cannot connect users to servers in India. The Indian government has also forced Twitter and Facebook to block certain content and users from its social media platform speaking out against its policies.³

The Sikh American community is deeply concerned that the involvement of the Indian government in the extra-judicial killing of a foreign citizen on foreign soil represents a significant and disturbing action to suppress dissenting voices throughout the diaspora. This view is shared by Sikh communities around the globe.

While we welcome the statements by NSC spokesperson Adrienne Watson and the follow up by Admiral John Kirby that the U.S. government is taking these reports very seriously, we encourage the Administration to take further action. We encourage you to:

1. Provide reassurances to the Sikh American community that they are safe to express their views and exercise their First Amendment rights free from violence, surveillance, censorship, and harassment by foreign states
2. Meeting with Sikh American leaders to discuss their concerns
3. Make a clear statement that violations of the freedoms of members of the Indian diaspora in the U.S. and other allies will not be tolerated
4. Support the Canadian government in their investigation and efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable
5. Hold the Indian government publicly accountable for their actions, including a public condemnation of their involvement in Mr. Nijjar's murder

We thank you for considering the concerns of the Sikh American community around the murder of Mr. Nijjar and how it impacts the ability of the Sikh American community to freely exercise their rights free from fear and intimidation. These

² <https://www.hrw.org/asia/india>

³ https://saldef.org/wp-content/uploads/SALDEF_Amritpal-Singh-Censorship-Report-06302023.pdf

allegations represent a serious and significant departure from democratic norms that must be met with a strong response.

Respectfully,



Kiran Kaur Gill
Executive Director