

Slough Gurdwara Retains 'Khalistan' Boards After Ruling

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In a landmark decision, the UK Charity Commission has permitted Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Slough to retain plaques displaying the word “Khalistan,” ruling that they do not breach political guidance for charities. This resolution, announced on 7 August 2025, concludes a six-year investigation sparked by a complaint in 2019, highlighting the delicate balance between religious expression and charitable regulations in the UK.

The controversy began when an Indian journalist, visiting the Slough gurdwara in Berkshire, noticed a prominent “Khalistan” board within the premises and reported it to the Charity Commission, the body overseeing charities in England and Wales. Gurdwaras, registered as charities for their public benefit, are prohibited from engaging in political campaigning that does not align with their charitable purposes. The journalist’s complaint suggested the boards promoted a political movement, prompting a regulatory compliance case to assess whether the display violated these rules.

Khalistan, meaning “land of the pure” in Punjabi, holds dual significance. For many Sikhs, it represents a spiritual ideal of a just and equitable society, akin to religious concepts like the Christian “Kingdom of God.” However, it is also associated with a political movement advocating for a separate Sikh state in India, a contentious notion, particularly in India, where such advocacy is often criminalised. The Slough gurdwara’s management argued that the boards, in place for nearly 50 years, reflected the term’s religious meaning, not a call for political separatism.

In December 2024, the Charity Commission issued a Regulatory Action Plan, initially ordering the gurdwara to remove the plaques by 10 March 2025. This directive triggered significant backlash within the Sikh community, with the gurdwara’s committee decrying it as interference in religious affairs. The ultimatum prompted a meeting involving Sikh organisations and three Sikh MPs, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, Preet Kaur Gill, and Jas Athwal, who engaged with commission officials to clarify the cultural and religious context of the boards.

Following extensive consultations with Sikh community representatives and a report from Jasdev Singh Rai, Director of the Sikh Human Rights Group, the Charity Commission reversed its stance. Rai’s report emphasised that “Khalistan” in the gurdwara context is a spiritual aspiration, not a political campaign for statehood. The commission concluded that the boards, which contained no separatist messaging, aligned with the gurdwara’s religious objectives. A spokesperson stated: “After substantial review of evidence and consultation with stakeholders, the display of the boards does not breach our campaigning and political guidance for charities.”

Dabinderjit Singh, lead executive for political engagement at the Sikh Federation UK, welcomed the ruling, noting that the commission recognised “Khalistan” as distinct from phrases like “Khalistan Zindabad,” which carry explicit political connotations. He suggested

that this decision sets a precedent, allowing other gurdwaras in cities like Birmingham, Derby, and Leicester to display similar plaques without regulatory scrutiny.

The ruling has broader implications for religious freedom and freedom of expression in the UK. It underscores the Charity Commission's role in navigating complex cultural issues while ensuring charities adhere to legal boundaries. The commission's ongoing probe into the gurdwara's governance, separate from the Khalistan issue, continues, with several requirements of the Regulatory Action Plan already met due to improved administration.

The decision has not been without criticism. Some community voices, including former MP Claudia Webbe, expressed concern over the investigation's duration and its perceived targeting of Sikh expression, possibly influenced by external pressures. The Sikh Press Association highlighted the need for transparency regarding any correspondence that may have shaped the commission's initial approach, pointing to broader concerns about foreign influence on UK regulatory bodies.

For the Sikh community, the ruling affirms the right to express religious identity within charitable settings, provided it does not cross into political advocacy. The Slough gurdwara's plaques, a fixture for decades, symbolise a spiritual vision rather than a political agenda, a distinction now formally recognised by the UK's charity regulator. This case highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in regulatory decisions, ensuring that minority communities can practice their faith without undue restriction.