

**Questionnaire for the Ontario Liberal Leadership Candidates**

**About the Canadian Sikh Association (CSA):**

The Canadian Sikh Association (CSA) is a socio-political organization that aims to put forth a collaborative effort in recognizing, exploring, and addressing the opinions, concerns, and issues of Canadians. Local members of the Sikh community in the Greater Toronto Area established the Canadian Sikh Association in 2009.

Our mission is to promote multiculturalism in Canada by encouraging and providing a platform as well as resources for active participation in social and political activities that support equality and acceptance irrespective of culture, religion, gender, caste, creed, and race.

In structure, the CSA's general members and the Board of Directors work hand in hand in the governance of the organization as well as formulating its policies.

**Introduction:**

The Canadian Sikh Association's Provincial Committee prepared three questions which were sent to all six of the leadership race candidates for the Liberal Party of Ontario. The candidates include: Eric Hoskins, Gerard Kennedy, Charles Sousa, Harinder Takhar, Kathleen Wynne, and Sandra Pupatello. The responses we received from the candidates are shown below; however, a response was not received from the office of Sandra Pupatello. The questions were compiled based on issues that the Canadian Sikh Association has been pursuing, in some cases with other organizations.

**Aim:**

The aim of sending out the questionnaire to the leadership candidates was to determine their position on some issues that are important to the Sikh community and what they are willing to do to address them as Premier of Ontario.

**Objectives:**

Upon receiving the responses from the candidates, the Canadian Sikh Association and the other organizations that we have been working with will be able to determine which candidates are most committed to addressing the issues put before them. For the first two questions, the Canadian Sikh Association is seeking legislative and/or policy changes. For the third question, we are seeking recognition of the issue.

1. *In 2006, in the Supreme Court of Canada decision of Mulanti v. Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, a case where a Quebec school authority prohibited a Sikh student from wearing a Kirpan, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that preventing the student from wearing a Kirpan would violate his freedom of religion. Despite this Supreme Court of Canada decision, many public and private institutions do not allow wearing of the Kirpan on their respective premises. **If elected as Leader, will you initiate legislation and/or policy to fully recognize the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in all aspects of life in Ontario?***

**Eric Hoskins:** I have a deep respect and appreciation for religious diversity. Part of this stems from my past career as a physician living abroad. Ontario's diversity is the key to its success and one of the reasons I am so proud to live, work and raise my child here. I was pleased earlier this year when an agreement was reached through the Ontario Human Rights Commission that allows Sikhs to carry Kirpans into Toronto courthouses, and I would support extending it throughout Ontario. It serves as an example of how reasonable religious accommodation policies can be achieved – something all levels of government should continually strive to deliver. I believe through meaningful open dialogue we can reach accommodations that work for all Ontarians.

**Gerard Kennedy:** Freedom of religious expression is a right guaranteed under the Charter of Rights. I have numerous personal friends and colleagues that practice the Sikh faith and wear the 5 K's and I am very impressed by their humble sincerity and depth of conviction in this regard. I have always supported the five articles as key to Sikh expression of their faith in Canada. I would be very open for a human rights amendment that could address this and other religious practices that would lessen the burden on minority communities to prove what has been established after long and difficult court processes; that there is no compromise to safety and that daily wear Kirpans, for example, serve an important ceremonial purpose. I look forward to contributing to further understanding, tolerance and respect of Sikh and other minority religions among the public at large.

**Charles Sousa:** I believe strongly in the right of religious freedom and I respect the decisions of the courts and the Human Rights Tribunal when it comes to the wearing of the Kirpan in public spaces. I encourage the community to continue their commendable work with government and government agencies, including our municipal and provincial law enforcement, to create a deeper understanding of the Sikh articles of faith. Sikhs have a rich tradition in Ontario and I will work with the community to ensure that this rich culture is shared with all Ontarians.

**Harinder Takhar:** I fully support the religious rights and freedoms of all religious groups, and will continue to work to ensure that these are fully recognized and respected.

**Kathleen Wynne:** I know the Five K's are essential to the a Sikh way of life and I will continue to accept and work on further acceptance of the Five K's in public places. I look forward to meeting with groups like yours and others to further educate myself on the importance of these articles of faith and others and how we as government officials can assist in ensuring these conversations continue to happen.

2. *Over the last many years, Sikhs have struggled in order to seek acceptance and accommodation of their faith in Ontario. The provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba have recognised the Sikh faith by granting an exemption from wearing a helmet to turban-wearing Sikhs when riding a motorcycle. Many countries, such as the United Kingdom, have passed legislation to grant such an exemption as well. **If you become Leader, will you recognise the Sikh faith and support a helmet exemption for turban – wearing Sikhs in Ontario?***

**Eric Hoskins:** It's important that we live in a province that respects and celebrates the diversity of our communities. We should always strive to find reasonable, pragmatic accommodations that respect the religious and cultural traditions of our communities. With respect to motorcycle helmets, I would immediately work with the Sikh community to find a solution.

**Gerard Kennedy:** I reviewed the policy document on this issue kindly provided by the Canadian Sikh Association that covers the balance between risks of health cost and safety concerns and human rights. I feel that Ontario is a great province with accommodations for diversity and a society with a great deal of understanding and compassion for articles of faith such as the Turban. As Premier I will work with the Sikh community to find an appropriate way to bring this matter to the House and address the concern of the double standard between provinces.

**Charles Sousa:** During this past year I have had the opportunity to meet with many members of the community to discuss Ontario's motorcycle helmet laws. We need to continue our open dialogue as we work to balance the importance of religious freedom with government's need to secure public safety. I am confident that, working together with the other parties, we will find a solution to this and other issues through our ongoing respectful dialogue and by keeping an open mind.

**Harinder Takhar:** I have encouraged and advised Sikh organizations to convince all parties to co-sponsor a joint all party bill to move the motorcycle helmet issue forward in a meaningful way.

**Kathleen Wynne:** I understand that a number of other jurisdictions in Canada and in other countries have exempted Sikhs from helmet rules. I am committed to further learning from those jurisdictions, especially other Canadian jurisdictions, to discover what led to the policy decisions and also what the results have been since implementation in those jurisdictions.

I do wish to have a full understanding of all aspects of this issue. I will also rely on my caucus for direction on this matter as well as the opposition and where they stand on this issue, as the legislature is in a minority.

- 3. The year 1984 was a very traumatic year for the Sikhs. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Sikhs were killed in India and victims of systemic human rights abuses. As a result, many Sikhs fled the country and settled in Ontario. Until this day, many are still traumatized by the state-sanctioned abuses that they witnessed. **If elected as Leader, what steps will you take to recognize the harm suffered by the Sikhs and address the needs of victims who have still not received justice for their suffering?***

**Eric Hoskins:** The tragic incidents of November 1984 in India represent a failure of humanity and an injustice that must never be forgotten. Sikhs, along with other communities that have faced similar atrocities around the world, must be supported in their efforts to remember and importantly to help us learn from such events so that Ontario and Canada can be on the forefront of advocating for whatever measures are necessary to ensure such events never happen again. That includes seeking accountability, justice and redress to the victims.

**Gerard Kennedy:** In a recent letter to the Sikh Activist Network I stated, “It is vitally important we continue to remember the victims of the genocidal massacre of Sikhs in 1984 in India, just as it is to foster growing awareness to all human rights contraventions wherever they arise in the world.” I believe it is important that we must all stand together to uphold human rights. Our relations with India must be based on mutual respect and the reciprocal ability to conduct honest and open dialogue on issues, including human rights and fair treatment of minorities.

As the Leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario and Premier of Ontario, I will work to remember these victims just as we remember the victims of other unfortunate tragic events, particularly those that have not fully been requited with justice and peace. The loss of innocent life needs to be remembered and I will always stand for that.

I note my work on the Katyn massacre with the Polish community, the Holodomor Genocide in Ukraine and the human rights violations in Tibet as examples of other issues where I have long and vigorously upheld human rights. We must not forget the past; nor the current injustice and oppression so many around still face. I am always willing to stand with the Sikh community in your efforts to bring about truth, peace and fairness for all peoples.

**Charles Sousa:** In Ontario, I will ensure our government and our party is one that is guided by the principles of respect and understanding in all we do. I will work actively with the Sikh community and all Ontarians to promote and spread a message of respect for human rights, both here at home and abroad. Working with the federal government, we as Ontarians can encourage other countries to recognize the importance of securing human rights for all.

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As premier, I will encourage Ontarians to raise awareness with all levels of government where human rights violations are of concern.

**Harinder Takhar:** As a Canadian who is also Sikh, I was deeply affected by the unfortunate events of 1984. This is a human rights issue and as much as we must work together to ensure such events are never repeated, anywhere, we must also work to educate and create awareness about tragic events like this. As global citizens we have a responsibility to cooperate to ensure basic human rights are protected and those who violate them are prosecuted.

**Kathleen Wynne:** I have been learning a lot about the events of 1984 and have further learning and research to do on this front – but what I can tell you is that I will continue to point out heinous acts of crimes that have been committed in the world regardless of where they have happened. Social justice is very important to me and as we have seen with the recent events in India regarding the young female who recently passed away, we all have work to do when it comes to minority rights. I know I have the most knowledgeable caucus and legislature at my disposal. Issues like 1984 are not partisan issues and I look forward to talking to other party leaders at Queen’s Park.

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