

The Sikh community of Austin and suburbs is deeply saddened by yesterday's events in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, where six members of the Wisconsin Sikh community were killed in an act of mindless violence. Many more people were injured, including the veteran police officer who was shot while protecting the lives of others in the Gurdwara (temple). Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of all the victims, the Sikh community of Oak Creek and all the people in the greater Milwaukee area that suffered this tragedy. Our prayers are also with the family of the gunman that carried out the shootings and was subsequently killed by the police.

The killings today are another in a series of events of mindless and misdirected hatred toward the Sikh community after 9/11. There have been more than 700 reports of hate-related incidents against the Sikh community after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Sikhism is a 500-year old monotheist faith with its origins in Punjab, India and is different from Islam and Hinduism. With 25 million followers worldwide and over 700,000 in the US, Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world. Observant Sikhs do not cut their hair and Sikh men wear a turban. Due to the turban, Sikh men are often mistakenly identified as Taliban or Islamic extremists. While the community has often been targeted in retaliation for the terror attacks of 9/11, Sikhs are a peace-loving people that do not condone violence against people of any faith.

The greater Austin area is home to about 300 Sikhs that are fully integrated into their local communities. They are model citizens and form an integral part of the American diversity that enriches the lives of everyone in this area. Local leaders from various religious faiths have reached out to the Sikh community of Austin to express their solidarity and support in this trying time, for which we are grateful. The community will be holding a candlelight vigil on Tuesday, August 7 at 8:30PM in front of the Capital building in memory of the people that lost their lives and to pray for the families of the victims. Please visit <http://www.austingurdwara.org/> for more details as preparations for the event are finalized. Everyone is invited to attend and join hands with the Austin Sikh community to stand together as Americans.

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