

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
11 January 2006

MEDIA CONTACT
Manmeet Singh | 210.507.5111

Film Release - The Widow Colony: India's Unsettled Settlement

San Antonio, Texas – Socio-political leaders, human rights activists, community leaders and civic organizations came together for the international premier of the film, “The Widow Colony – India’s Unsettled Settlement” on 26 November 2005 at New Delhi’s Siri Fort auditorium. The film, directed by Harpreet Kaur, explores the continued suffering of victims of anti-Sikh pogroms in India. It records their battle for justice and struggle for survival.



Director Harpreet Kaur with the panelists

A moving and emotional depiction of the trauma that still haunts innumerable widows of the Sikh massacre, the film unearths the sad and deplorable condition of most of these widows living in the *vidhva* (widow) colonies of Delhi. Produced by Sach Productions, the film records the testimonies of victims, Sikh widows and men, who survived the bloodbath of November '84. The context to the anti-Sikh violence is provided by the following subject experts: Justice Sachar, Harvinder Singh Phoolka, Kuldip Nayar, Patwant Singh, Madhu Kishwar, and Jaskaran Kaur. The film focuses on the incalculable loss of human life. Scores of widows were created in Delhi, most of who lived in colonies of Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri, Himatpuri, Sultanpuri and Mongolpuri. A conservative estimate puts the total number dead around 4,000. And if losing their loved ones was not enough, justice has been denied to these victims for over two decades. Rather, three accused were awarded with cabinet level positions in the Indian government.



Harinder Singh,
Executive Director, Sikh Research Institute

The international premiere and a panel discussion were organized by the Sikh Research Institute. A reflection was shared by Harpreet Kaur, director of The Widow Colony, followed by a personal statement from Darshan Kaur, a victim and fierce activist. Harinder Singh, Executive Director of Sikh Research Institute, mentioned that pogroms will recur in India, unless the State acknowledges and records these violations in a transparent and honest manner, towards cleansing itself of the people and the institutions that perpetrate these crimes, and addressing the survivors' right to knowledge, justice, and reparation. He concluded, “I hope you’ll lose some sleep tonight. But when the dust and the emotions settle, do something on behalf of all unrepresented and downtrodden people.”

Panel discussion raised many critical questions, from the issues of justice to rehabilitation. The widows have been living in meager conditions for decades; unable to give proper care to their children, the widow colonies are filled with uneducated jobless youth. Panel chairman Patwant Singh, author and orator, discounted the notion of “we should forget about it” and cautioned against dire consequences due to judicial failure. Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney General of India, raised the issue of impunity. Harvinder Singh Phoolka, the champion of victims, shared legal hindrances. Manoj Mitta, Senior Editor of The Times of India, emphasized the role of Kamal Nath in massacre. Amita Malik, a film critic, highlighted arts as a medium for awareness and social justice. The discussions highlighted the half-hearted efforts of successive governments to punish the accused.



Patwant Singh,
Chairperson of the panel

Also partaking in the discussions were Colin Gonsalves (Supreme Court advocate), Dipankar Gupta (author), Tarlochan Singh (Chairman, Minority Commission), SJS Chatwal (former High Commissioner to Canada), Anoop Singh (former Vice Chancellor, Punjab Technical University), Amrik Singh (former Vice Chancellor, Panjabi University), Madhu Kishwar (Editor, Manushi), Prakash Rao (convener, Lokraj Sangathan), R.S. Chatwal (General Secretary of Sikh Forum), Rajinder Singh (Convener, Shiromani Khalsa Panchayat), among others.

###