FREE AKAL TAKHT

MODELLING GLOBAL SIKH SELF-GOVERNANCE

Diaspora Polling Brief

7 NOVEMBER 2016

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INTRODUCTION AND TIMELINE
ABOUT #FREEAKALTAKHT

FREE AKAL TAKHT

MISSION

Sikhi was born as a revolution of diversity and inclusion. The #FreeAkalTakht movement aims to free the *Akal Takht* ('throne of the timeless one') from political interference and reclaim its state of social, economic, political and spiritual sovereignty. #FreeAkalTakht will welcome discourse from all Sikhs—without judgement of an individual's path in life—and act as a source for representative, collective power.

#FreeAkalTakht is focused on supporting the following two resolutions that were declared at the November 2015 Sarbat Khalsa:

- Resolution #2 – Reaffirms Akal Takht Sahib as a Guru-gifted sovereign Sikh institution which must become fully independent again. *A draft committee is to be constituted comprising of Sikhs both from the Homeland and the Diaspora by 30 November 2015 to report on Akal Takht Sahib System which includes Sarbat Khalsa and Jathedars governance and process. Plan to be adopted by Vaisakhi 2016 when the next Sarbat Khalsa is to be held.*
- Resolution #5 – Creates a World Sikh Parliament to represent Sikhs globally under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib. *A draft committee is to be constituted comprising of Sikhs both from the Homeland and the Diaspora by 30 November 2015 to report on its structure and governance. Plan to be adopted by Vaisakhi 2016.*

In January 2016, with the deadlines for the 2nd and 5th resolutions having passed with no engagement by those tasked with implementing them, on behalf of the Sikh *Quam* the #FreeAkalTakht team began the process of convening and mobilizing engaged Sikhs around the world to collate data to assist in addressing these resolutions.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES

Figure 1 lays out a chronology of what #FreeAkalTakht has been doing since Sarbat Khalsa 2015. Initially #FreeAkalTakht worked on creating drafts and consulting the sangat (figure 2) for an Akal Takht Sahib system. An international tour covered 40+ cities across the US, UK, Canada and Australia to engage major Sikh organisations, influencers and the wider sangat in person, through town-halls and one-on-one's. In parallel, with an active global social media campaign and a media outreach program #FreeAkalTakht has invited all those with interest and an opinion to share their views. Starting in July we changed our focus, as mandated by the sangat, to gathering polling data to try to find consensus with the sangat on proposals for Jathedar Criteria and the Sarbat Khalsa process for the next Sarbat Khalsa.

Figure 1-Timeline of activities

MODELLING REGIONAL SARBAT KHALSA
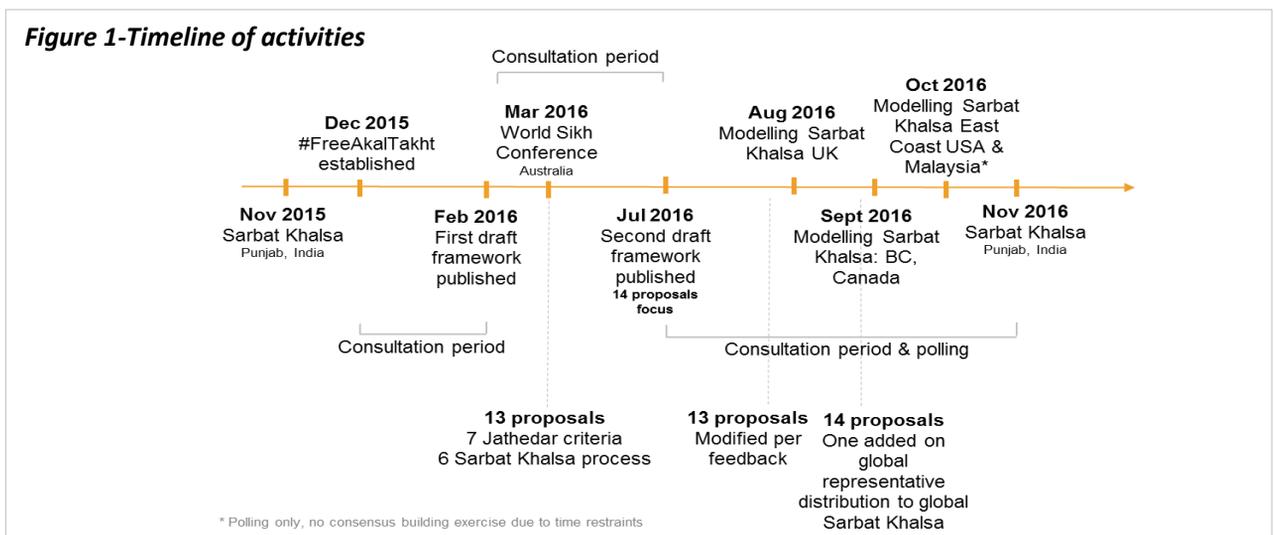
Figure 2 –Consultation process
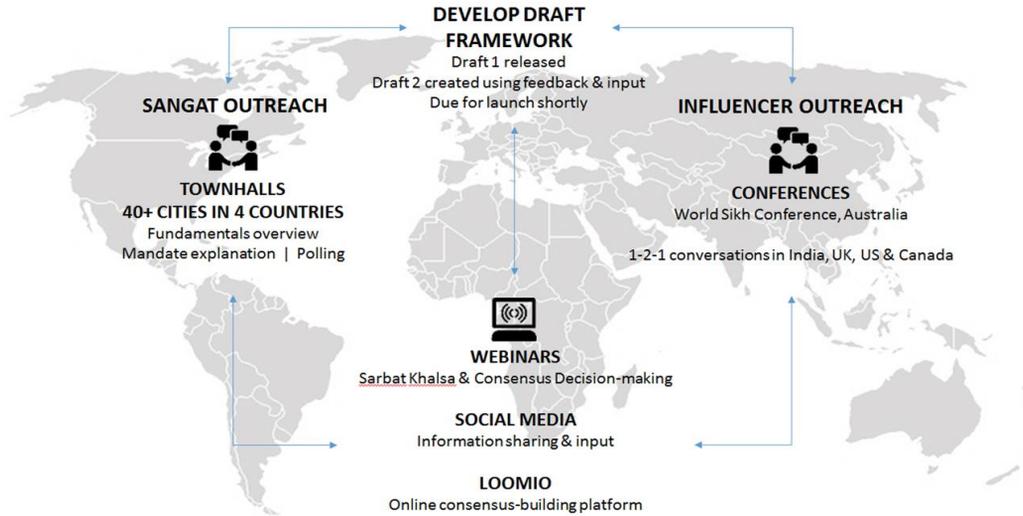
To gather the polling data and to attempt to find consensus, the #FreeAkalTakht team developed a process for regional modelling of Sarbat Khalsa. This process was used at 4, open-invite events in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States of America, and Malaysia. After each event, improvements were made to the process with attendee input.

Figure 3 – Four Events

CONTENT OF BRIEF

This brief will explain the process used at the 4 regional model Sarbat Khalsa's the #FreeAkalTakht team facilitated and will share the polling results from the events and a set of recommendations for future Sarbat Khalsa's based on these results.

The process was developed in the spirit of Sarbat Khalsa. In order to do this the #FreeAkalTakht team researched and developed 8 Principles of Sarbat Khalsa. We then created a process based on those principles. Below are the 8 principles followed by a walkthrough of the events and the process employed.

1. We recognize that we are sovereign in all dimensions of existence, from faith to people.
2. Sangat has to take decisions on temporal matters dealing with a situation prevailing at a particular time by strictly following the principles laid down by Guru Granth Sahib and taking guidance from historical precedents.
3. Participation open to all Sikhs who have primary allegiance to Guru Granth Sahib and to the authority of Guru Khalsa Panth.
4. Consensus / a common minimum program must be pursued. Majority-rule as a methodology is rejected. Issues fully aired (all perspectives). Cohesive and well-developed perspectives are encouraged.
5. Influence by virtue of individual stubbornness or charisma are discouraged.
6. Personal animosities and internal disputes must be transcended for progression of the Panth as a whole. Sangat must differentiate between personal and panthic living. Certain sangat groups and individuals may not be inclined to work together personally, but in Sarbat Khalsa they must work together in common reverence for the Guru.
7. To participate, one must surrender oneself to the sangat and must be able to fully explain one's intentions when they are in question. Secret opinions and private reservations must not exist. All views and intentions must always be open and disclosable. If one does not surrender oneself, the right to participate is forfeited.
8. Sangat members must be open to criticism and must also give criticism in a compassionate, non-malicious and constructive way to further the principle of unity and to encourage receptive and productive deliberations.

Each event began with a presentation consisting of a short survey of Sikh history, Sikh concepts relevant to the governance of the Sarbat Khalsa, an introduction to the #FreeAkalTakht team, an introduction to the Principles of Sarbat Khalsa drafted by #FreeAkalTakht, and then an explanation of the workshop process. A copy of this presentation is available here http://www.freeakaltakht.org/regional_sarbat_khalsa.

After the presentation the attendees were instructed to open up their folders which were handed to them on arrival to the event. Attendees then reviewed the contents of the folder with their assigned #FreeAkalTakht volunteer facilitator. The folder contained:

- 7 Jathedar Criteria Proposals
- 7 Sarbat Khalsa Proposals
- Jathedar Criteria Worksheet
- Sarbat Khalsa Worksheet
- Stance Guidelines
- Principles of Sarbat Khalsa

The participants were instructed to consider each of the 14 proposals presented to them, and to provide his or her stance on the corresponding worksheets provided. Each participant had four different options for his or her stance. The Stance Guidelines sheet explained the difference between the four stances and what to do once your stance was selected.

These worksheets were then collected at the end of the session and were collated by #FreeAkalTakht volunteers. The results of the session were presented to the participants.

After this the attendees were divided into groups for open discussion to attempt to find consensus on the proposals after evaluating the results presented.

POLLING METHODOLOGY
WHAT IS A STANCE?

#FreeAkalTakht employs a consensus-based decision making approach (second Principle of Sarbat Khalsa), and proposes it as a model for adoption for future Sarbat Khalsa sessions.

In a simple vote on a proposal, voters are given two choices per proposal – either to vote for it, or to vote against it. If a proposal receives more votes for it than against it, then that proposal is deemed to be accepted by the majority and is adopted.

If it receives more votes against it than for it, then it is deemed to be rejected by the majority and is not adopted. In this case, the supporters of the proposal typically make contact with those who did not support it to try to negotiate a way for the proposal to be voted on again and adopted. This process can be time consuming and is often conducted in secret or behind closed doors.

Also, in a first-past-the-post, majority-wins approach, no regard is given to those who did not support the proposal. A very good recent example of this is the vote in the UK to leave the European Union, where a majority of 52% voted to leave the European Union, but 48% voted not to. This translates to approximately 16 million people who voted not to leave, whose views are not being taken into consideration.

In a consensus-based decision making approach, instead of there being just two options, each participant is given four options to select from when "voting" on a proposal. These options are:

- **Agree**
- **Stand-aside**
- **Disagree**
- **Block**

To "**Agree**" means that the participant agrees to the proposal being adopted. This is equivalent to voting for the proposal in a traditional voting model.

To "**Stand-aside**" means that the participant does not agree with the proposal, but does not object to it being adopted. The end result of this is the same as voting for the proposal in a traditional voting model, but the record will show that the participant did not "Agree".

To "**Disagree**" means that the participant does not agree with the proposal, and wants to explain his/her disagreement with it by entering an explanation on the record, but does not object to it being adopted. The end result of this is the same as voting for the proposal in a traditional voting model, but the record will show that the participant did not "Agree". The record will also include an explanation from the participant as to why a "Disagree" stance was entered.

To "**Block**" means that the participant does not agree with the proposal, wants to explain his/her disagreement with it by entering an explanation the record, and objects to the proposal being adopted. The end result of this is the same as not voting for the proposal in a traditional voting model. The record will include an explanation from the participant as to why a "Block" stance was entered.

Consensus
WHAT TO DO WITH STANCE?

One of the fundamental differences between a traditional voting model and a consensus-based decision making approach is that if a "Block" is entered for a proposal, then that proposal cannot be adopted until the participant who entered that "Block" is prepared to enter another stance. In this way, a "Block" is equivalent to a veto.

The consensus-based decision making approach requires that "Block" stances be addressed by amending the blocked proposal by taking into account the explanation entered alongside the "Block" stance. For this reason, it is required that an explanation be entered if a "Block" stance is entered. If an explanation is not entered, then the "Block" stance is invalid, as it is not suitable for being addressed.

If a proposal receives no "Block" stances, then it can be adopted based on certain criteria:

- If the stances entered for a proposal are all "Agree", then the proposal is suitable for being adopted immediately;
- If the stances entered for a proposal consist of "Agree" and "Stand-aside" stances, then the proposal is suitable for being adopted immediately;
- If the stances entered for a proposal consist of "Agree", "Stand-aside" and "Disagree" stances, then the proposal <u>may</u> be suitable for being adopted immediately, or, depending on the circumstances and the criteria agreed by the decision making body, the proposal may be further reviewed to reach a position on the next polling such that only "Agree" and "Stand-aside" stances are entered.

One criteria to consider is the percentage of "Agree" stances versus "Stand-aside" and "Disagree" stances. If this percentage is very high, then it may be considered that the proposal is suitable for adoption. On the other hand, if there are equal proportions of each stance, then the proposal may be a candidate for redrafting.

The advantage of a consensus-based decision making approach is that it allows for a wide spectrum of views to be considered and taken into account. Minority voices are considered alongside majority voices. This ensures that participants in the decision making process are not disenfranchised by virtue of holding views that are not in the majority.

The #FreeAkalTakht team believes this approach is in keeping with historical explanations of Sarbat Khalsa and Gurbani principles of equality, inclusivity and collective responsibility.

A disadvantage of a consensus-based decision making approach is that it is more complicated to implement and administer. Nevertheless, #FreeAkalTakht is of the view that this disadvantage is outweighed by its advantages.
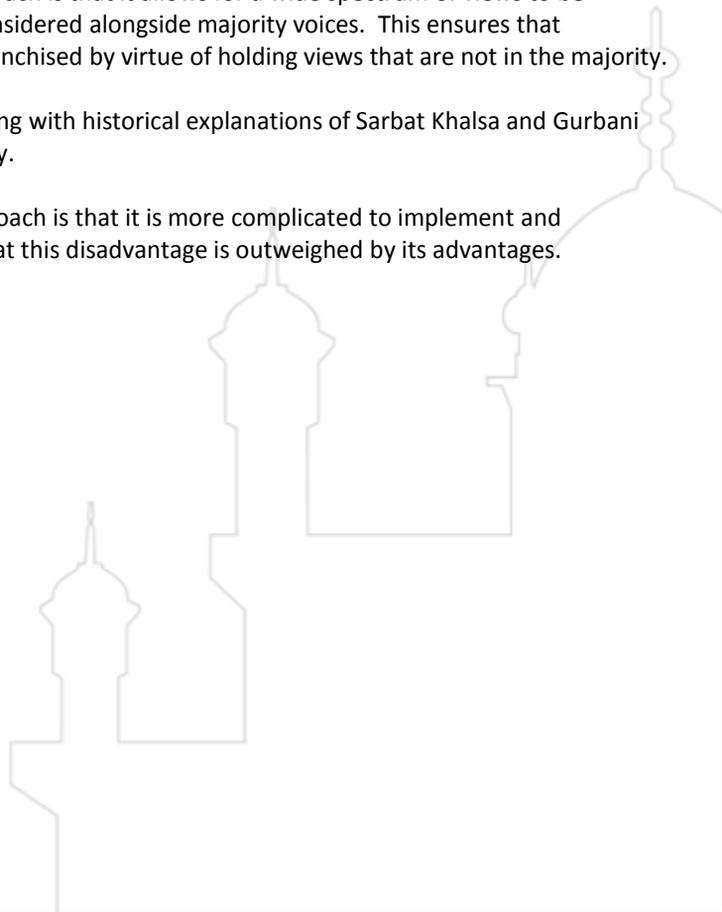
14 PROPOSALS
WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

The Proposals originated from the World Sikh Conference held in Melbourne, Australia, in March 2016. Sikhs from all over the world assembled there between 10 an 13 March. The attendees included a diverse range of Sikh leaders, scholars and activists, and several sangat members of Australia from the cities of Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast, Sydney, Perth, Alice Springs, Riverland, Adelaide, Griffith, Shepparton and Canberrawho. It was convened to discuss issues regarding Sikh Sovereignty, including challenges to the Sikh Nation, the Akal Takht, and Sarbat Khalsa.

Prominent members from Panjab, USA , Canada and New Zealand were:

Panjab: S. Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (General Secretary, SGPC), G. Kewal Singh (Former Jathedar Takht Sri Damdama Sahib), G. Eshar Singh (United Sikhs), S. Sarabjit Singh Verka (Human Rights Activist), S. Gurtej Singh, IAS (Scholar), S. Rajwinder Singh Bains (Human Rights Lawyer), S. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (Historian), S. Jarnail Singh (MLA, Delhi, AAP)

USA: S. Yadwinder Singh (AGPC), S. Hardayal Singh (Global Sikhs), S. Harinder Singh (Free Akal Takht), S. Resham Singh (SADA), S. Jasvir Singh (Radio Voice of Khalsa), S. Sukhwinder Singh (Radio Voice of Khalsa)

Canada: S. Jagmeet Singh (MPP, NDP), S. Moninder Singh (Azadi)

New Zealand: S. Rajinder Singh (Supreme Sikh Society, New Zealand), S. Kashmir Singh (Sikh Society, Tauranga), S. Niab Singh (Supreme Sikh Society, Takanini, Auckland)

After the 3-day conference, consensus was found on minimum criteria for Jathedars and a Sarbat Khalsa process. These points were organised into 13 proposals: 7 Jathedar Criteria proposals and 6 Sarbat Khalsa process proposals.

The #FreeAkalTakht team conducted simple polling (attendees raised hands for their stance) on these 13 proposals in the USA, Canada, and UK workshops. We then took that polling data and shared it with major representative organizations in the UK and advocated for a joint large scale event to gather input and find regional consensus on the 13 proposals. We went to the UK first because that is where the diaspora Sikhs are the most organized in terms of established representative organizations. Sikh Council UK hosted this event with open invites to all Sikh organizations, thought influencers and unaffiliated interested persons. Ahead of the UK event, the #FreeAkalTakht team re-drafted the proposals to reconcile obvious drafting issues following the World Sikh Parliament. This resulted in reorganizing the Sarbat Khalsa proposals into 7 proposals (instead of 6), adding a new proposal on global representative distribution.

JATHEDAR CRITERIA
PROPOSALS 1 - 7

1. Jathedars must have partaken in Khande-ki-Pahul prepared with 5 Banis (Japji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Tav Parsad Savayye, Chaupai Sahib, Anand Sahib), must be Nitnemi, must be devoted to and practice Miri-Piri spirit, and must not accept anyone as Guru except Guru Granth Sahib and Guru Khalsa Panth.

2. Jathedars must be experienced and educated in Sikh studies and affairs with considerable knowledge on Sikh history, philosophy, Gurbani, world politics, and world religions.

3. Qualified candidates for jathedar position shall not be excluded due to their demographic category, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and caste.

4. Jathedars must demonstrate sufficient leadership qualities (excellent communication skills and ability to work collectively and collaboratively); active in public affairs and community liaison.

5. Jathedars must recognize that they are the servants of the Panth, and that they do not have the authority to make executive decisions outside assigned tasks. Tasks are assigned to Jathedars by the Panth. The Jathedars lead teams to complete these tasks under guidance of Guru Granth Sahib.

6. Jathedars must not hold any prejudice towards any person or group based on a demographic category such as age, gender, ethnicity, and caste.

7. Jathedar must have complete commitment to preservation and keeping alive the distinct and sovereign identity of Guru Khalsa Panth and building up of appropriate condition in which the sentiments and aspirations of the Sikh Qaum will find full expression, satisfaction, and facilities for growth.

1. Decision-making would follow principles of Sarbat Khalsa in that they are consensus-based. All proposals must be in line with teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. This does not mean there is 100% agreement. Individuals who disagree would record their dissent for the record but allow the proposals to be implemented without undermining the process. Individuals who wish to block must be prepared to explain why and then actively work with the Panth to rewrite the proposal so that it reconciles the concerns of those who blocked. All blocks must also be in line with the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.

2. Items to be deliberated at Sarbat Khalsa should focus on matters of urgency, economic and political issues, leadership violation, and upkeep of the integrity of Panthic institutions.

3. To ensure the implementation of each decision made, a Jathedar must be declared to lead a team with a deadline and an action plan.

4. Every representative to the Sarbat Khalsa: Be initiated into Guru Khalsa Panth (Amritdhari). If initiated Sikhs are not available, not able, or simply do not feel qualified they may defer duties to a Sikh who is deemed qualified by the local Sangat. Must accept the authority of Guru Khalsa Panth and Guru Granth Sahib together as the Guru. Must profess belief in a Free Akal Takht that is self-governed by Sikhs for Sikhs without interference from the state or political parties (including Sikh parties).

5. The Sarbat Khalsa should be an open and transparent process. All 30 million Sikhs should have access to the proceedings online.

6. Quorum would require representation of 51% of the Sikh Qaum divided into the following segments consideration made to population, geography, schools of thought, thought leaders, and disenfranchised segments (i.e. women, Dalit, Mulnivasi, youth etc.). 80% correlated to population size, region's power, and Sikh influence in region; 18% experts/researchers (policy, doctrine, seva, history) and luminaries; 2% extraordinary Panthic contributors.

7. Total number of representatives to Sarbat Khalsa is 500, the distribution is as follows: 80% 400 representatives: (1) South Asia: 263, (2) Americas 46, (3) Europe 46, (4) East Asia 18, (5) Oceania 11, (6) Africa 10, (7) Middle East 6. Regions autonomously select representatives. Regions must consider the following when selecting representatives: Gurdwaras, Sikh Organizations, university/college Sikh Organizations, Non Gurdwara affiliated Sangat/Jathebandis, and disenfranchised segments. 18% 90 representatives. Each group listed above has a responsibility to identify and send experts/researchers and luminaries. These individuals may also take a general representative slot if the Sangat feels s/he can fulfil those duties as well. 2% 10 representatives. It is the Panths responsibility as a whole to identify those who have embodied Gurus Shabad extraordinarily. This category may exceed its allotted representatives.

OVERVIEW

- Around 300 people participated worldwide in the Modelling Sarbat Khalsa events in which proposals were presented and evaluated (we have not included those people who may have provided comments or stances via the #FreeAkalTakht website).

- Of the 14 proposals, one proposal received no blocks (J5), and so in accordance with the consensus-based decision making methodology adopted by FreeAkalTakht, based on the sample of 300 people, proposal J5 is suitable for adoption.

- A further 3 proposals received a minimal number of blocks, and an analysis of the comments associated with those blocks suggest that they can be relatively easily reconciled.

- For 11 out of the 14 proposals, more than 85% of the participants entered an Agree stance.

- For all of the proposals, more than 95% of the participants entered a stance that, under the consensus-based decision making methodology, would allow a proposal to pass (i.e. an Agree, Stand-aside or Disagree stance).

- The spread of stances entered by the 300 participants in the Modelling Sarbat Khalsa events is indicative of the spectrum of views expressed by the Sikh *Quam* on these proposals, and is helpful guidance to those tasked by the Sarbat Khalsa to address these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT SARBAT KHALSA

- Take into consideration the "Principles of Sarbat Khalsa" the #FreeAkalTakht team have developed as a foundation for the development of Sarbat Khalsa Process.

- Encourage Model Sarbat Khalsa's all over the world either using #FreeAkalTakht team's regional process or a better version of it to collect sangat stances on the 14 proposals on Jathedar Criteria and Sarbat Khalsa Process.

- A Sarbat Khalsa Process for the Global level must be developed by a team of the Panth's impartial, best and brightest using lessons learned from #FreeAkalTakht's Modelling Regional Sarbat Khalsa events.
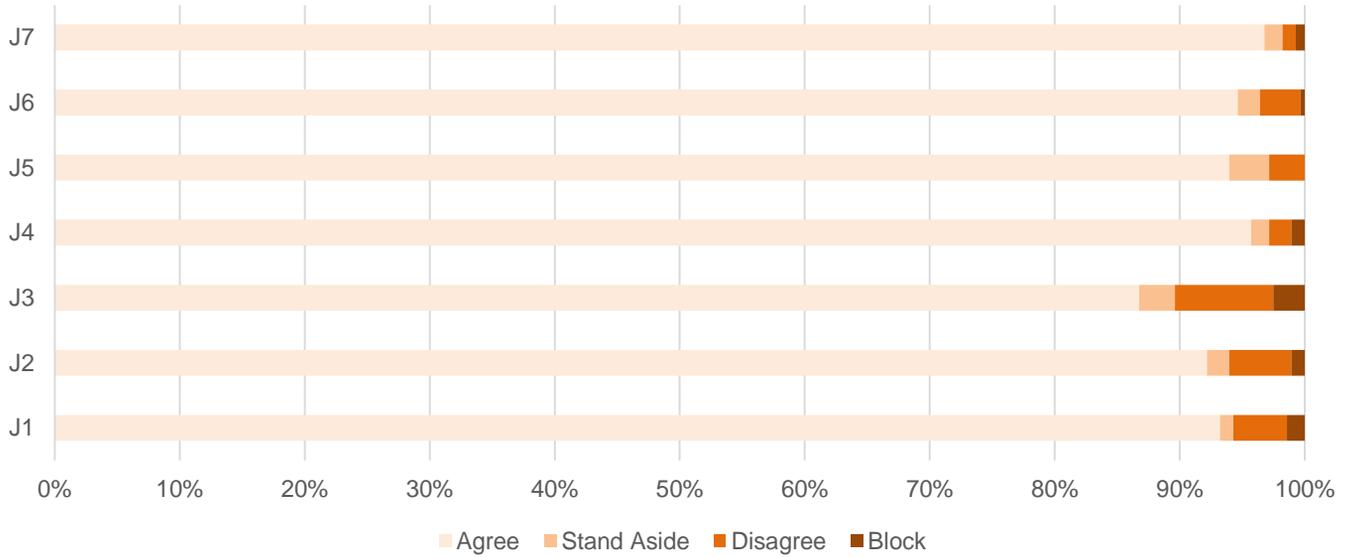
POLLING RESULTS
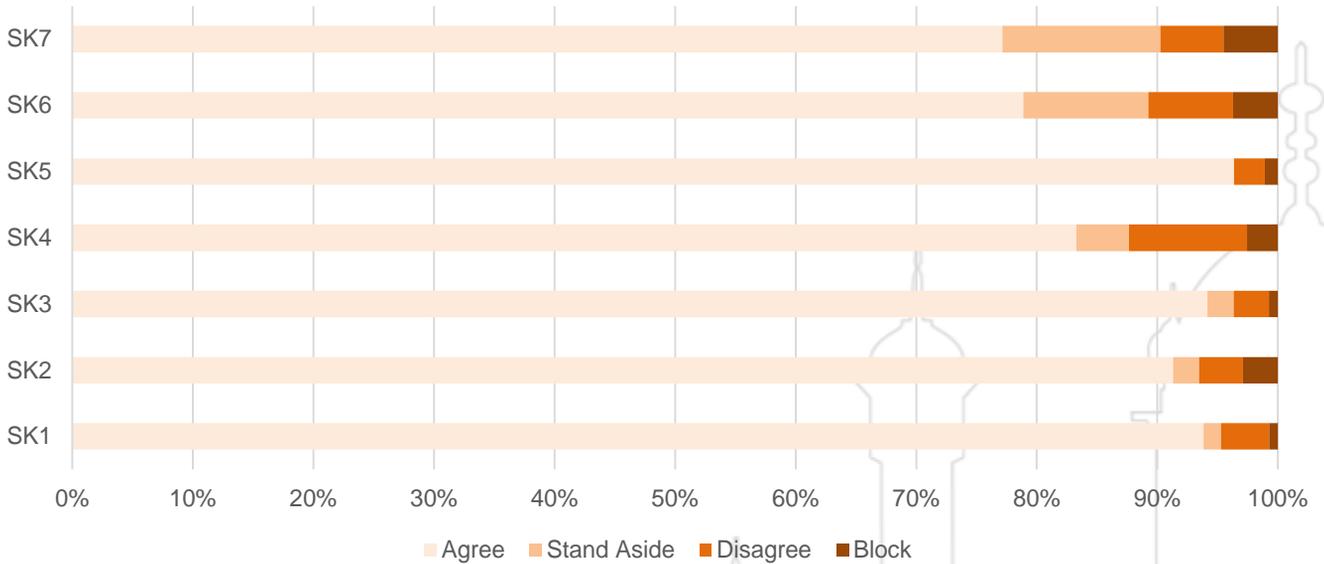## AROUND 300 PARTICIPANTS WORLDWIDE

FREE AKAL TAKHT

JATHEDAR CRITERIA PROPOSALS

Agree Stand Aside Disagree Block

SARBAT KHALSA PROPOSALS

Agree Stand Aside Disagree Block

#FreeAkalTakht COMMENTS ON ATTENDEE DISAGREE AND BLOCK STANCES

FREE AKAL TAKHT

Individual attendee comments can be found here http://www.freeakaltakht.org/regional_sarbat_khalsa

Summary of Attendee Comments

1. Question of the purpose of Amrit for leadership positions in the Panth
2. Question of who can participate in Sarbat Khalsa and in what capacity: Khalsa? Non-Khalsa?
3. One must profess belief in Khalistan to participate
4. Amount of representatives being skewed in favour of population will drown diaspora voices.
5. Men should only be in leadership roles specifically for Jathedar and Panj Piare
6. Must have minimum age for Jathedar
7. What is the point of quorum

#FreeAkalTakht Responses

1. A Jathedar needs to be One with the Guru - this means to be of the Khalsa, which means to be Amritdhari. The Guru leads us by mandating an individual's spiritual and political life. In the Sikh revolution the ideal human being is both saint and soldier (sant and sipahi) or both spiritual and political (miri and piri). The current Guru is both Guru Granth Sahib Ji and Guru Khalsa Panth. The Guru Khalsa Panth is the collective dedicated initiated Sikhs of the order of Guru established in 1699 whose creation was fostered by all 10 Guru's to be heirs to the throne of the Guru. When one becomes a Khalsa they are in a leadership position as a limb of the body of the Guru. Though these individuals must also demonstrate ability.

2. There have been cases where non-Amritdhari or non-Kesadhari Sikhs have demonstrated great service to the Panth. Sikhs who haven't partaken Khande-ki-Pahul also are part of the Sikh Qaum and must be included in some inclusive manner while upholding Guru Khalsa Panth's authority.

3. Sikh State is a subject matter Sarbat Khalsa can deliberate on just like any other matters facing the Panth or global community. This is an attempt to outline a governance process to deliberate in open, transparent, Gurmat-oriented manner.

4. In Sarbat Khalsa there is no majority rules program - it is consensus based. The content of one's proposals measured against Shabaad and Guru Ithias are what matter not the amount of sangat backing it. Representatives skewed to South Asia exists because of the population number being the largest. A representative must be able to effectively deliver proposals from the Sangat they are representing, so distributing representatives per Sangat population ensures this can be done. The exact role of a representative is not spelled out which leads to this question.

5. Gurbani does not limit leadership roles in Sikhi to men. Historical precedent is clear that women have played a central and integral role in our faith's history. There have been exceptional Kaur leaders at many points in Sikh history that did everything from management to military command. The precursor to Jathedars were the Manjidars and 4 out of 22 Manjidars appointed by the Guru were women. Another precursor to Jathedars were the Misldars - Sada Kaur was Misldar of the Kanhaiya Misl with 8,000 cavalry under her command. Mata Sahib Kaur, mother of all Khalsa, issued Hukamname as a leader and managed the Guru's Golak for a time, sending funds to the Khalsa. Some other examples of amazing woman leaders in Sikh history: Mata Sulakhani, Bibi Bhani, Mai Bago, Bibi Dalair Kaur, Mata Khivi, and many more. Guru Gobind Singh Ji asked for 5 heads in 1699 not 5 male heads.

6. One must take note of exceptional Sikhs, such as Baba Buddha Ji who had wisdom beyond most at his very young age which gave him the name Baba Buddha Ji. Another Sikh of such wisdom may arise again.

7. This proposal tries to answer the question: "What is the minimum number of attendance (the quorum) required for this to be a Sarbat Khalsa", there have been times in history where some could not make it to the Sarbat Khalsa but accepted whatever was decided there.

Appendix

A	=	AGREE	:	Agree with proposal
S	=	STAND-ASIDE	:	Disagree with proposal BUT will allow it to pass WITHOUT comment
D	=	DISAGREE	:	Disagree with proposal BUT will allow it to pass WITH comment
B	=	BLOCK	:	Disagree with proposal WILL NOT allow it to pass MUST explain

JATHEDAR CRITERIA				NAME & AFFILIATION:	TABLE:

#	A	S	D	B	For DISAGREE and BLOCK, write your reason (and, if BLOCK, amended proposal)
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					