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South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI) and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) Comment on the Sikh Temple Tragedy

The South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI) and the Midwest Office of the Japanese American Citizens League extend profound sympathies to the families of those who were killed and injured in a tragic act of violence at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin on Sunday morning in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

Although the shooter has been identified, a motive is yet to be determined, and authorities are investigating the possibility of a hate crime as well as domestic terrorism. There is no doubt the Sikh community in Wisconsin and throughout the United States feels a great sense of unease and apprehension resulting from this incident. Ever since the aftermath of September 11th, including when Balbir Singh Sodhi was shot and killed on September 15, 2001, by a gunman who declared, "I stand for America all the way," the Sikh community and other minorities have lived under an unfair burden of vulnerability.

SAAPRI and the JACL are organizations within the Asian Pacific Islander community in the Midwest that monitor and respond to anti-Asian sentiment. Incidents directed at Sikh Americans may appear to be random and isolated, but when they are viewed collectively over a period of time, a troubling pattern emerges that justifies enhanced actions by law enforcement. "It is crucial that the Department of Justice, through the FBI, collect and provide more detailed statistics on incidents against Sikhs, Muslims and South Asian Americans, so that policymakers and law enforcement are better equipped to combat hate crimes," said Ami Gandhi, Executive Director of SAAPRI.

The tragedy in Wisconsin on Sunday and a fire on Monday morning that destroyed a mosque in Joplin, Missouri are cause for heightened concern about the possibility of cultural and religious intolerance. "These communities need to know there is a strong reservoir of support for them," said Bill Yoshino, the Midwest Director of the JACL. "No community should be made to feel isolated and vulnerable in a society that values diversity," he added.

SAAPRI and the JACL sent a letter to the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin extending sympathies and support from the two organizations.

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