

US lawmakers commemorate 3rd anniversary of Gurdwara shooting

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Washington: Commemorating the third anniversary of the shooting at Oak Creek Gurdwara that killed several persons including Indians, US lawmakers today said that it is a sad reminder of how much work needs to be done to promote cross-cultural inclusion and understanding in America.

On August 5, 2012 a known white supremacist murdered six Sikh-Americans at the Gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

This past weekend, the Oak Creek community came together along with hundreds from around the US for the annual Chardi Kala Run/Walk in the spirit of hope and relentless optimism.

"This day is a time for us to renew our promise to fighting intolerance and hate everywhere. In the wake of the Oak Creek tragedy, we see people joining hands and standing up for what is right. We see other victims of hate reaching out to those devastated by the tragic Charleston church shooting. We see people coming together to say, 'enough is enough'," Congressman Joe Crowley said.

"Today serves as a sad reminder of how much work we need to do in this country to promote cross-cultural inclusion and understanding. Three years ago, we as a nation felt the pain of the tragic shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin," Congressman Mike Honda said.

The day, Honda said, must be remembered to honor the memory of those who died and use it as a reminder of what one must do in order to address the root causes of such hateful acts and turn to a new chapter of learning and understanding.

Congresswoman Judy Chu said it has been three years since the tragedy in Oak Creek, yet the scenes of that day are still fresh in ones minds.

"Instead of being the last fatal act of hate, Oak Creek has become just one in a string of many. Whether aimed at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin or a black church in South Carolina, hatred, bigotry, and prejudice tear at the fabric of equality and unity on which our country was built," she said.

"As we commemorate the third anniversary of the tragic Oak Creek shooting, we must work together to increase understanding, compassion, and connections within our communities," Chu said.

Noting the FBI is now tracking hate crimes against Sikh Americans, Crowley said the country will have a better picture of the challenges before it.

"But the fact remains that Sikhs are all too often victims of intolerance and hate, and that must change. I will continue to be relentless in my work to secure civil rights for Sikh Americans and educate others about this beautiful community. The best way we can honor the lives lost in the Oak Creek tragedy is through meaningful change," he said.

The Oak Creek shooting helped drive a critical change in the FBI hate crimes reporting protocol this year.

For the first time, there are now categories for crimes motivated by anti-Sikh, Hindu and Arab sentiment. The White House also created a high-level Interagency Task Force last year focused on addressing hate violence nationwide.

"In the spirit of Chardi Kala or relentless optimism, we honor the victims of that tragic day three years ago and stand with our 51 community partners nationwide to help stem the tide of relentless violence targeted at our communities and all communities of color," said South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) in a statement.

It said that in the last six months alone, there have been violent incidents targeting Hindu, Arab and Sikh communities in New Jersey, North Carolina, and California, respectively.

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