



Remarks by Hon. Gurjeet Singh Aujla, MP

AirQualityAsia India Group Member

GUAPO General Assembly

30. 10. 2018

Hon. Deputy Mayor, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- Thank you to GUAPO for allowing me as AirQualityAsia India group member to share my thoughts. This is an issue very close to my heart as it affects so many of my constituents in Amritsar.

Air Pollution Across Asia and India

- Pollution is a major problem across the world, but especially in Asia. Southeast Asia sees 2.4 million citizens die per year.
- The [WHO](#) has found that 11 of the top 12 most polluted cities are located in India.
- I represent Amritsar, a renowned religious and cultural city in the northern state of Punjab with a total population of more than 1.3 million [2.5 million with surrounding rural suburbs] which is affected by dirty air from many sources.
- This June, we experienced the worst [air quality](#) in the last 10 years, the winter smog season has also started.

Cultural Impact

- Amritsar is blessed to have Harmandir Sahib known as the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine for Sikhs and of special importance to humanity at large, that has more than 7 million devotees and visitors every month. However, pollution is damaging the 430-year old temple's beautiful gold-plated walls.
- Poor waste management and open burning of 600 metric tonnes of daily garbage produced dump further adding to the toxic air in the city.
- The temple management committee is working to [reduce pollution](#) from its kitchen, that provides free meals to devotees every day by switching from wood or coal to gas and electric machines.

Health Impact and Crop Burning

- Vehicular traffic, crop burning, and industrial activity all contribute to the release of nitrogen and sulphur compounds, carbon monoxide and several heavy metals. In 2008, the National Green Tribunal had enacted a ban on all new registrations of diesel auto-rickshaws in the city, but enforcement remains an issue.
- Air pollution is very dangerous for all Amritsar residents who can develop stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic and acute respiratory diseases. The children are at even greater risk of asthma and COPD.
- The city also has a shortage of green spaces and parks.
- Farmers in northern India traditionally burn left over stubble every winter to quickly clear their fields. This winter AQI in Amritsar, according to the Punjab Pollution Control Board Amritsar reached 149 as of 29 October 2018.
- While the NGT and the Punjab government has tried to distribute happy-seeders and technology subsidies to farmers, illiteracy and economics affect farmer's interest in employing these new technologies to speed through 3 cropping seasons a year.

Solutions- NGT and Punjab Government

- The Punjab Government has taken steps to monitor air quality; has set up programs to educate farmers, about environmental costs to present and future generations.

More is needed:

- Provide more economic incentives to stop burning leftover paddy.
- Develop more green spaces and parks in Amritsar.
- Stronger enforcement of the NGT ban on illegal diesel auto-rickshaws. There is also a need to
- Employ efficient strategies and technologies to manage solid waste in the city premises and the main dumping ground at Bagtanwala.
- Center must focus on other cities apart from Delhi, and aid state governments in further subsidizing the cost of improving air-quality.
- We would like Amritsar to be the first Indian city to join GUAPO; on my return I will meet with the Chief Minister and the Mayor.