

# U.S. Sikhs urge Obama to visit Golden Temple, despite rumors

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(RNS) American Sikhs are urging President Obama to visit the famed Golden Temple in India next month, despite his administration's reported concern that wearing the headscarf required for entry will inflame false rumors that Obama is a Muslim.

The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund said that if Obama did not visit the Golden Temple, a sacred site for Sikhs, he would add to anti-Islamic sentiments in America.

"The religious site stands for many of the same ideals as America equality, universality and freedom," SALDEF said in a statement. "In canceling his visit, President Obama emboldens those who seek to divide us based on race and religion.

Sikhs have been often mistaken as Muslims because turbans, uncut hair and beards are articles of faith for men. Since 9/11, Sikhs have endured anti-Muslim discrimination and attacks in the U.S. because of the confusion between the two faiths.

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said Wednesday (Oct. 20) that the schedule for the visit to India has not yet been finalized.

"This trip will focus on our business in the cities of Mumbai and

New Delhi, he said in a statement. "But we pick where we were going to go on trips based on what we hope to accomplish.

Although Obama is a Christian, he has had to fend off rumors that he is a Muslim. The New York Times reported Tuesday (Oct. 19) that an unnamed U.S. official said Obama will not visit the Golden Shrine for fear that pictures of the president in a headscarf will be used by political opponents as proof that he is not Christian.