"Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab" Opens July 24
at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History

The Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History is celebrating the opening of a new exhibition, “Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab,” on July 24. The exhibition presents more than 100 pieces of Sikh artwork and artifacts produced from the 18th century to the present, including miniature paintings; arms and armor; traditional textiles and dress; coins; musical instruments; jewelry; sacred texts; and modern works of art. It also includes a scale model of the Darbar Sahib (commonly referred to as the “Golden Temple”), a Sikh sacred space at Amritsar, India. Many of these objects are on loan from private collections and will be on public display for the first time.

The exhibition, on view indefinitely, highlights the culture and history of the Sikhs, a people originally from the Punjab region (in modern-day northern India and Pakistan) whose religious, cultural, and artistic traditions have expanded with Sikh migrations around the world. There are approximately 250,000 Sikh Americans and their community roots date back well over a century. Sikhism was founded about 500 years ago and today has 22 million followers worldwide.

“This Smithsonian initiative to help preserve and celebrate Sikh heritage comes at a crucial time,” says Paul Michael Taylor, director of the museum’s Sikh Heritage Project and curator of Asian, European and Middle Eastern Ethnology at the Smithsonian. “Many Sikhs describe their religion as one that draws from both Islam and Hinduism, and they feel that their presence in these neighboring countries contributes to peace between them.”
Taylor will address the themes of the exhibition in a lecture entitled, “Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab,” during the museum’s regular “Friday At Noon” series on July 23 from noon to 1:00 p.m. in Baird Auditorium. The fourth annual “Sikh Heritage Lectures,” focusing on Sikh cultural history, will be held on Saturday, July 24 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the museum’s Baird Auditorium. The 2004 lectures will emphasize “Sikh Representations Today,” and will include presentations by modern Sikh artists whose works appear in the exhibition, and a live performance of Sikh music, by Dya Singh World Music Group. All programs are free and open to the public.

“Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab” is organized by the museum’s Sikh Heritage Project, a research and outreach component of the Asian Cultural History Program in the department of anthropology. The Smithsonian’s Sikh Heritage Project, launched in 2000, was established “to support acquisition, conservation/restoration, and exhibition of Sikh collections, to support research on the heritage of the Sikhs, and to support other Sikh cultural activities at the Smithsonian Institution.” The Sikh Heritage Project’s first Sikh Heritage Fund Lectures were held at the National Museum of Natural History in August 2001.

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., in Washington, D.C., welcomed more than 5.5 million people in 2003, making it the most visited natural history museum in the world. Opened in 1910, the museum is dedicated to maintaining and preserving the world’s most extensive collection of natural history specimens and human artifacts. It also fosters critical scientific research as well as educational programs and exhibitions that present the work of its scientists and curators to the public. The museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum and research complex. The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History has extended summer hours, 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., every day through Labor Day. Admission is free.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Images available upon request. Please call Michele Urie at 202-786-2950.