

Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders – Principles for Immigration Reform

We are Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community organizations and members raising the voices of our communities in the immigration reform debate and working towards a broad, inclusive immigrant rights movement. As AAPIs, we stand in solidarity with all immigrant communities including Latinos in demanding fair and humane immigration reform and we oppose efforts to divide communities against each other. As immigrants, we believe in building coalitions with African American and other allied communities. We support the following principles that call for fair and humane immigration reform by keeping families together and protecting rights and liberties.

Keep Families Together

Many families are forced to wait decades to be reunited with their loved ones. Others may come without papers to join their families, because of tremendous backlogs and lack of legal channels to enter the United States. Families also are separated by punitive or unjust immigration laws that do not value family unity when detaining or deporting immigrants and do not treat all families equally. Humane immigration reform must keep families together by:

- **Providing a Path to Citizenship for the Undocumented**
Undocumented immigrants and their families need a path to citizenship without any hidden traps so that they can fully participate in our society. Despite significant contributions to the U.S. economy, including paying taxes, undocumented immigrants are forced to live in the shadows, often exploited by unscrupulous employers and in constant fear of deportation and family separation. For undocumented children, unfair immigration laws crush their hopes of attending college and contributing to their home, the U.S. Of the nearly 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, an estimated 1.5 million are Asian (Pew Hispanic Center). Approximately one in five Korean Americans do not have legal status (National Korean American Service & Education Consortium), 300,000 undocumented Chinese Americans live in the U.S., and nearly 400,000 undocumented are from India (Pew Hispanic Center).
- **Eliminating the Backlogs**
Families should be allowed to stay together and the tremendous backlogs in the family-based immigration system must be eliminated. Family reunification is the primary reason Asians immigrate to the U.S., but AAPI families suffer some of the worst immigration backlogs. More than 1.5 million Asians are caught in the backlog and must wait for years, if not decades, to reunite with their families (Asian American Justice Center). China, India and the Philippines have historically experienced the longest waiting periods and currently a person from the Philippines who is being sponsored by a U.S. citizen sibling must wait 23 years for an immigrant visa (U.S. Department of State, May 2006).
- **Stopping the Unjust Detention and Deportation of Immigrants and Refugees**
Immigrants and refugees should not be subject to cruel detention and deportation. Punitive immigration laws have torn apart AAPI families and communities. Immigrants who have established roots in the U.S., including legal permanent residents, are being detained and deported for minor infractions. In addition, many who flee their homes to escape persecution are arbitrarily denied refugee or asylee status and instead are deported back to their home country to face persecution. This is especially true for the Southeast

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Asian community, where many young Cambodian Americans are being repatriated to Cambodia, a land their families fled and which many of them never knew.

Protect Rights and Liberties

Immigrants, including both legal non-citizens and the undocumented, have seen their rights violated or taken away. Enforcement measures have unjustly targeted or scapegoated some of our communities. Fair immigration reform must protect the rights and liberties of immigrants by:

- **Protecting The Rights of All Workers Regardless of Immigration Status**
All workers deserve dignity in their jobs as well as the protection and enforcement of U.S. labor laws that guarantee a minimum wage and security from harassment and retaliation. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders often labor in critical service and manufacturing industries and all AAPIs regardless of immigration status deserve full labor protections. Immigrant workers in particular face high levels of exploitation and intimidation, often because of a lack of legal documentation, and many work long hours in unsafe conditions and without overtime, access to workers' compensation and health care, or job security.
- **Restoring Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**
The basic rights and liberties of all including immigrants must be restored and protected. Since the passage of anti-immigrant legislation by Congress in 1996 and especially in the aftermath of 9/11, the rollback of civil liberties has had a disparate impact upon AAPIs. Today, our communities – particularly South Asians and Muslims – continue to be targeted by immigration officials, leading to the detention and deportation of thousands of community members. In addition, the rights of all non-citizens including lawful permanent residents have deteriorated. All members of our communities should have the right to fair hearings and a true appeals process to prevent the arbitrary removal of individuals. In addition, immigrants should not be subject to long and indefinite periods of detention, mandatory detention or cruel deportation based on minor infractions.
- **Ending Criminalization of Immigrants**
Immigrants should not be subject to raids or abuses by immigration or other law enforcement agents. Historically, immigrant communities have been scapegoats for our country's economic and political problems, from the 19th century exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the World War II internment of Japanese Americans to the post-9/11 Special Registration Program targeting South Asian and Muslim men. Ethnic and racial profiling in the name of national security have criminalized our communities and destroyed many families. In addition, recent efforts to permit local police to enforce immigration laws undermine the trust of immigrant communities and counter efforts to protect immigrants from criminal activity.

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List of supporting organizations

API Equality-LA
Asian and Pacific Islanders California Action Network (APIsCAN)
Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team (APAIT)
Asian Pacific American Bar Association (APABA)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC)
Asian Pacific Americans for Progress – Los Angeles (APAP – LA chapter)
Asian Pacific Health Care Venture, Inc.
Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON)
Asian Youth Center (AYC)
Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF)
Chinatown Service Center (CSC)
Chinese American Legal and Education Foundation
Chinese Catholic Center of Los Angeles (St. Bridget)
Filipino American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI)
Khmer Girls in Action (KGA)
Korean American Bar Association (KABA)
Korean Resource Center (KRC)
Korean Youth and Community Center (KYCC)
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)
Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP)
Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC)
Loyola Marymount University Asian and Pacific Islander Student Association (LMU APSA)
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)
Organization of Chinese Americans – Greater Los Angeles chapter (OCA-GLA)
Pacific Asian Counseling Services (PACS, formerly known as WRAP Family Services)
Philippine American Bar Association (PABA)
Pilipino Workers' Center (PWC)
Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA)
South Asian Bar Association (SABA)
South Asian Network (SAN)
Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA)
Special Service for Groups, Inc. (SSG)
SSG/PALS for Health Program
Taiwanese American Citizens League (TACL)
Taiwanese American Lawyers Association (TALA)
Thai Community and Development Center (Thai CDC)
Thai Health and Information Services, Inc. (THAIS)
UCLA Asian and Pacific Islander Law Students Association (UCLA APILSA)
UCLA Asian Pacific Coalition (UCLA APC)
The Hon. Michael F. Eng, Council Member, City of Monterey Park
Fr. Gabriel Lui, Pastor, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church
Rev. Mark M. Nakagawa, Centenary United Methodist Church