Asian American Civil Rights Groups Condemn Racist Behavior During World Series and Welcome Punishment for Anti-Asian Gesture and Slur

Atlanta, GA, October 30, 2017 — During game three of the 2017 World Series, Houston Astros’ player Yulieski Gurriel made a racist gesture and slur after hitting a home run off Los Angeles Dodgers’ pitcher, Yu Darvish, who is Japanese and Iranian. Gurriel was filmed pulling back the corners of his eyes and calling Darvish “Chinito”, a Spanish term Gurriel acknowledged was offensive to Asians. After the incident sparked a firestorm of criticism, Major League Baseball (MLB) faced great pressure to take action. It responded the following day, suspending Gurriel for five games in 2018 and ordering sensitivity training in the off-season.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta issue the following statement:

“As Asian American civil rights organizations, we were shocked to see the slanted eye gesture that Houston Astro Yuli Gurriel directed at Los Angeles Dodger Yu Darvish during the World Series on Friday night. Although Darvish found Gurriel’s actions offensive, Darvish’s response to this incident was gracious and urged unity. But when Gurriel pulled back his eyes, he disrespected not only Darvish but millions of Asian Americans for whom that is perhaps the most commonly experienced racist gesture. Ironically, Gurriel and Darvish represent teams from two of the most diverse cities in the country, both with significant Asian American populations.

Because the slanted eye gesture is often dismissed as merely childish or ignorant, our four Advancing Justice organizations welcome Major League Baseball’s swift decision to suspend Gurriel and to order him to attend sensitivity training in the off-season. Racism in sports is not always seriously addressed, so we appreciate that the MLB responded quickly and unequivocally to this racist gesture. Without meaningful consequences and accountability, such discriminatory behavior -- whether it is targeting Asians, African Americans, women, or other groups -- will persist.

However, we are also concerned that in deferring the suspension into the next season, Gurriel and the Astros suffer no immediate consequences. We believe this sends an unfortunate mixed message to Asians and Asian Americans that while it is wrong to ridicule us, it is not so wrong as to merit immediate punishment. In addition to the five-game suspension in 2018 and the off-season sensitivity training, we believe that Gurriel should have been disciplined immediately in the form of a significant fine or even a one-game World Series suspension.

Major League Baseball, with its racially diverse audience and global roster, has a significant platform to address issues of racial diversity and inclusiveness. MLB’s response to Gurriel’s gesture and slur indicate a willingness to show leadership on such issues, and we encourage the MLB and Houston Astros to reach out to our organizations because we know the history of discrimination against Asian Americans and we welcome the opportunity to educate the players and the league about issues of racial sensitivity, particularly involving Asians and Asian Americans.”

About Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta (formerly Asian American Legal Advocacy Center or AALAC) is the first non-profit law center dedicated to Asian immigrants and refugees (“Asian Americans”) in the Southeast.
Our goal is to engage, educate and empower under-represented Asian Americans to greater civic participation.

We are one of five independent organizations that make up the national Asian Americans Advancing Justice. Together with our affiliates in Chicago, DC, Los Angeles and San Francisco, we bring more than 100 years of collective experience in addressing the civil rights issues faced by Asian Americans and other vulnerable and underserved communities. Visit www.advancingjustice-atlanta.org.