Administration Escalates Attacks on Southeast Asian Families Before the Holidays

114* federal, state, and local leaders join community groups to denounce deportation efforts

Atlanta, Georgia, December 18, 2018 — Elected leaders across the country are joining grassroots and community-led efforts to demand justice publicly for Southeast Asian refugees dealing with the uncertainty and terror of deportations right before the holidays.

Yesterday, between 35 and 40 Cambodian American community members were deported. Without an emergency gubernatorial pardon from Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington and last-minute legal avenues of relief secured by Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, the number of individuals facing deportation would have been 46 — the largest group to ever face removal in one sweep. In addition, community members anxiously await the outcome of a recent meeting between the Vietnamese and US governments to renegotiate a long-standing bilateral agreement protecting Vietnamese refugees who arrived in the United States prior to 1995 from deportation. While it was reported that the Trump Administration would reinterpret the agreement, the Vietnamese government ultimately decides if it will issue more travel documents to allow for more deportations. The majority of individuals impacted by these attacks are refugees with decades-old convictions for which they have already served their sentences. Many are now integral members of their communities and support US citizen families.

This escalated enforcement inspired more than 50,000 individuals to sign on to public petitions and mobilized action from local groups across the country in a matter of days, including efforts to halt the flight leaving for Cambodia and a highly publicized rally in Little Saigon, in Southern California. Additionally, the following federal, state, and local leaders answered our call to send letters to the White House, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the State Department to condemn the Administration’s unjust treatment of refugees:

Reps. Judy Chu (CA-27) and Pramila Jayapal (WA-7) led a congressional letter signed by 55* members of the House expressing opposition over the detention and deportation of all Southeast Asian refugees. The letter also highlighted their concern over the Administration’s efforts to force Cambodia and Laos to accept back Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong individuals, urging the use of “prosecutorial discretion to ensure that finite resources are not being wasted to tear families apart and deport individuals who have tranformed their lives.”

Rep. Alan Lowenthal (CA-47) led a separate letter signed by 26 members of the House expressing opposition to any negotiations that remove protections for pre-1995 Vietnamese refugees. In addition, the letter stressed that “the terms of the MOU recognize the complex history between the two countries and the dire circumstances under which hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled to the US to seek refuge from political persecution in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.”

More than 50 state and local elected officials joined advocates on a similar letter expressing their concern over the potential change in the current US-Vietnam repatriation agreement. Additionally, the California Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus also released a statement denouncing the Administration’s actions.

“We condemn the Trump Administration’s inhumane efforts to deport Cambodian community members right
before the holidays, and we denounce the US government’s ongoing effort to change its historical interpretation on the ability to deport Vietnamese refugees,” said Quyen Dinh, executive director of SEARAC. “However, we are heartened at the outpouring of support for our communities from individuals and elected officials across the country. It shows that there is more political will and power than ever before to find a solution to this crisis. Our country can have no more unjustified deportations of Southeast Asian refugees. We remain vigilant and are hopeful that the 116th Congress will bring a real pathway to freedom for our families.”

“Our communities are devastated by the relentless attacks on our Cambodian and Vietnamese families,” said Sina Sam, commissioner at the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, and a community organizer with Formerly Incarcerated Group Healing Together (FIGHT) and the Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN). “The rampant ICE arrests within our neighborhoods and increased deportations of our family members before the holidays is especially heartbreaking. But our communities are resilient and strong. We are coming together like never before to mobilize and organize to reunite and keep our families together.”

“This Administration’s recent tactics to deport more Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees are part of a long and ongoing effort to terrorize our Southeast Asian communities,” said Phi Nguyen, litigation director at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta. “While our communities have long been fighting to keep their families together, we are pleased that our elected leaders are stepping up to speak out against the cruelty of this Administration’s detention and deportation policies. We hope that this is only the starting point for a meaningful discussion on how they can help fix our broken immigration system.”

*Number to date

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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.