Asian Americans Advancing Justice Condemns Executive Orders Banning Immigrants and Refugees From Predominantly Muslim Countries

Shameful Past Violations of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Against Asian Americans Must Not Be Repeated

Atlanta, GA, January 27, 2017 — Today, President Trump issued an executive order banning immigrants and refugees from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. “We condemn today’s executive orders condoning fear and ignorance in the name of national security,” said Elica Vafaie, National Security and Civil Rights Attorney at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus. “It’s a direct affront to communities still reeling from the spike in anti-Muslim violence and hate incidents since the election season.”

The executive order ends the Syrian refugee program and seeks to prioritize refugees that are religious minorities in their country. President Trump has stated that Christian Syrian refugees will be given priority to come to the U.S. The order also suspends temporarily the entire refugee program and greatly reduces the number of refugees that will be welcomed to our country.

In addition, the executive order effectively bans all entry of both immigrants and nonimmigrants from Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan for a 30 day period without any assessment of actual security threats. The ban has the potential to be extended indefinitely if those countries fail to meet certain requirements. The executive order extends to United States Legal Permanent Residents and may also apply to individuals with dual citizenship (for example, a citizen of both France and Iran). Asian Americans Advancing Justice has already received community inquiries expressing confusion and fear that individuals may not be able to travel, reunite with family members, or enroll in educational programs.

“We have an obligation as Asian Americans to speak up when the most shameful parts of our history stand to be repeated. The unfair targeting of Muslim immigrants is a haunting reminder of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882: during a period of intense anti-Chinese violence and persecution, it was the only U.S. law ever to ban immigration of a specific ethnic group,” said Karin Wang, vice president of programs and communications at Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles.

“The language in this executive order demonizing Muslims is reminiscent of the rhetoric that led to the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, which was one of the most flagrant violations of civil liberties in American history,” said Megan Essaheb, assistant director of immigration and immigrants’ rights at Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC. “We cannot forget the fear mongering and hysteria which lead to the incarceration during World War II where more than 110,000 innocent people, mostly U.S. citizens, were incarcerated solely on the basis of their national origin.”

The focus of this executive order on travel and immigration does not prohibit in any way the revival or creation of a new discriminatory registry program. If anything, we have seen in this first week that the new administration is delivering on campaign promises and is advancing discriminatory blanket policies that equate entire regions, ethnicities, and faiths as national security concerns.

“This executive order is based entirely on a false and biased assumption that people of a particular religion or
nationality pose a greater national security risk and should be subject to racial and religious profiling,” said Laboni Hoq, litigation director at Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles. “This policy and rhetoric jeopardizes our core values as a nation. As we did with the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), we will take up the baton to ensure that our civil rights and civil liberties are not violated or endangered in any way.”

Asian Americans Advancing Justice calls on all Americans to speak out against attempts to repeat shameful parts of our nation’s history with these new executive orders and to reject hateful rhetoric and policies.

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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.