



ADVANCING EQUALITY

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**Statement of Karen K. Narasaki
President and Executive Director
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on

The Charge That Minority And Low-Wage Workers Are Adversely
Affected By Immigration

May 3, 2007

The Asian American Justice Center, a national organization whose mission is to advance and defend human and civil rights, helped to lead this effort because we strongly believe that the issue of immigration should not be debated in a vacuum.

The immigration system is broken and so are the systems that affect the low-wage sector of the economy. Regardless of immigration, the global economy is generating problems for American workers, particularly for minority workers. As a nation, we need to have a more strategic plan to address these problems.

The solution is not to shut down immigration or pit immigrants against African Americans and other minority workers. The solution is to address the problems in the low-wage labor markets and ensure that sufficient resources are being invested in minority communities that have been underfunded since before immigrants came into the picture.

Rather than assume that the U.S. economy is a zero sum game, we can work together to grow both the economy and the availability of opportunities.

Our principles take this approach. It is not immigrants who are the problem but the systems they and minorities find themselves in.

For example, in order to ensure we are more accurately matching need for immigrant labor with the policies being set, we need to have more open and effective recruitment policies for workers in the U.S.

Employers should be required to advertise their jobs and not rely on immigrant networks so as to give all Americans an opportunity.

And cities needing more workers should be able to apply to a fund to help recruit American workers outside the city and to provide moving expenses as an incentive.

And any immigrant worker program must have full wage and hour and safety protections, and the right to organize and the right to change employers to choose those who are not seeking to artificially keep labor costs down by exploiting them. They need the right to choose to become legal permanent residents so they are dependent on the whim of their employers to stay in the U.S.

We are committed to working with African American, Latino and other stakeholders in this issue to making the systems work for all workers.

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The Asian American Justice Center (www.advancingequality.org) is a national organization dedicated to defending and advancing the civil and human rights of Asian Americans. It works closely with three affiliates – the Asian American Institute of Chicago (www.aaichicago.org), the Asian Law Caucus (www.asianlawcaucus.org) in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (www.apalc.org) in Los Angeles – and nearly 100 community partners in 49 cities, 23 states and Washington, D.C.