

Justice For New Americans

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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What: Press Conference calling for the Immediate Release of Capt. James Yee
Where: St. Boniface Church, 133 Golden Gate (near Civic Center), San Francisco, CA
When: Wednesday, November 12, 2003, 11 a.m.

San Francisco, CA – “Captain Yee, Set Him Free” is the slogan Cecilia Chang, President of Justice for New Americans, chose for this campaign. Chang is speaking of Captain James Yee, the recently arrested Muslim chaplain who had been assigned to the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba to advise the international prisoners held there. The military has charged Captain Yee with two counts of mishandling classified information related to his duties as the military chaplain. A coalition of civil rights, religious and community organizations are holding a press conference to call for the release of Captain Yee while the charges are pending against him, and for the government to take steps to ensure his rights are fully protected.

Yee’s civilian defense attorney, Eugene R. Fidell, president of the National Institute of Military Justice and a retired Coast Guard officer, says the two charges against Yee are minor transgressions that have not warranted maximum security, solitary confinement or a general court-martial. Due to Fidell’s efforts, Yee’s detention security status was recently downgraded from maximum to low.

“They are upset because Yee was doing his job making sure the rights of his clients were respected —this is preposterous!” exclaimed Chang. “He may be arguing with his superiors about the way his clients (detainees) were being treated. The secret arrest and allegations of espionage are forms of retaliation. They want to intimidate others not to speak up about the human rights violations at the base. Even Mr. Girod, the senior Red Cross official in Washington ... said he is going public with the charge because of the intolerable condition detainees are subjected to...(Source: Red Cross blasts Guantanamo – BBC News, October 10, 2003)

Several of Yee’s West Point Academy classmates have said they cannot believe Yee could have done anything more than make a stupid mistake out of sympathy for detainees held for two years in Cuba without charges. They call him kind, gentle and smart, and say he never showed interest in politics.

Military law requires an individual be tried within 120 days of being charged—December 10 for Capt. Yee. The prosecution was recently granted a 45-day extension from that date.

“The public must be allowed every bit of information about this case,” demands Chang. “We are very alarmed by the racial profiling evident in this case. We demand that Yee’s rights—and those of others being so mysteriously detained—be fully respected. The public deserves to know what is going on, what our government is really doing”

Among other things, advocates will announce that a broad coalition of national and regional civil rights organizations have sent a joint letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld criticizing the government's treatment of Captain Yee. The letter specifically calls upon the military to (1) release Yee pending the resolution of the two charges, (2) keep Yee's proceedings open to the public, (3) take steps to address the growing perception that the investigation into the espionage allegations at the Guantanamo military base involves the use of religious or ethnic profiling, and (4) conduct an investigation into the leaks to the media by military officials who have made false or exaggerated statements about Captain to address the growing perception that the investigation into the espionage allegations at the Guantanamo military base involves the use of religious or ethnic profiling.

The press conference is co-sponsored by Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Law Caucus, National Lawyers Guild, Blue Triangle Network (National and SF office), American Muslim Voice, Interfaith Freedom Foundation, and South Alameda Peace and Justice Coalition. Speakers include Cecilia Lee Chang, Samina Faheem, Marti Hiken, Father Louie Vitale, Ted Wang, and others.

Justice for New Americans (J4NA), formally known as WenHoLee.org, is a California public benefit corporation formed to eliminate biases in the United States arising from the erroneous perception that it is acceptable to deny the rights of foreign-born American citizens and their American-born children based on their country of origin, ethnicity and/or religious beliefs. The rights of all United States citizens are protected equally under the U.S Constitution and Bill of Rights. Since January 2003, J4NA has joined a coalition of civil rights organizations, including Amnesty International, the ACLU, and Blue Triangle Network, protesting the mass arrests and deportations of individuals who are of South Asian/Muslim and Middle Eastern backgrounds.
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