

NCRRR

National Coalition for Redress/Reparations
1911 Bush Street, #1-G
San Francisco, California 94115

D R A F T

Dear Friends,

A very deep and sincere thanks to all of you who have supported our efforts since the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRRR) was formed 10 years ago. It was only through the combined efforts of countless individuals such as yourself and many organizations that, after 48 long years, the government has apologized and taken the momentous and historic step of making amends for the enormous injustice it committed in 1942. Our only regret is that so many of those affected by the internment never lived to see this day.

Still Important Work to Be Done

Although the redress bill was won, we in NCRRR believe there is still important work to be done on both redress-related and broader issues of concern to Japanese Americans. After discussions in our chapters, we have made the decision to stay together and make some changes to better carry on this work. We are writing to share this decision with you, and to express our hope that you will join with us.

As part of the transition we are making to the post-redress period, we are changing our organizational name. We will now be known as [Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress? Nikkei Civil Rights Roundtable?]. We are also making structural organizational changes to enable us to operate more effectively in the years ahead.

The next period will be one full of challenges and potential. We believe there is a need for an organization that will carry out an approach to organizing that is grassroots, action-oriented and outspoken. We see the need to address matters related to redress and the internment, but also other civil rights issues and other matters of social justice.

While there are other Japanese American and Asian/Pacific organizations with similar aims, we believe that NCRRR offers a somewhat unique approach, and one that strengthens the overall effort to uphold our rights and interests. This approach was evident in NCRRR achievements during the redress campaign, such as:

- Taking a consistent and forceful stand for individual monetary payments, including organizing community rallies and programs;
- Organizing grassroots former internees to speak at the 1981 Commission hearings;
- Successfully pressing for Commission hearings in the community, and for translation for individuals who wished to testify in Japanese;

- Initiating a grassroots delegation of over 120 people, the largest Asian/Pacific lobbying effort ever, to go to Washington, DC in July 1987 to win Congressional support for the redress bill;
- Collecting and sending to the President and Congress well over 25,000 letters and hundreds of mailgrams in support of the redress bill;
- Working closely with key redress advocates in the House and Senate and seeking unity and cooperation with other pro-redress forces.

We believe that our approach has had a real impact on the redress movement as a whole. We think this approach can also have an impact in the on-going efforts to secure and protect our rights and help bring about a better and more just society for all. In addition, we have learned many rich lessons in organizing, and built many ties in the past 10 years, both of which will provide a solid foundation upon which to build as we move forward into our second decade of work.

Redress Work Not Yet Finished?

Why do we say that NCRR's work is not done? Although the goal of monetary compensation has been achieved, we feel it is important to follow up on implementation of the redress payments, and also to continue the work of educating our future generations and the American public as a whole about the internment.

Among the specific areas of concern are: providing information and assistance to those eligible for redress payments; monitoring legislation affecting government benefits to redress recipients; monitoring the verification and payment process; improving the accuracy and quality of school curriculum on the internment; helping to organize pilgrimages to the camps, such as the Tule Lake pilgrimage planned for September 1991; and holding commemorations, such as the Day of Remembrance events, and providing classroom speakers so that the internment and the suffering it caused will not be forgotten. Furthermore, as a community that endured the suffering of the internment, we should speak out when there is a danger of similar injustices being perpetrated against other minorities.

What Are the Broader Issues NCRR Will Address?

NCRR has long addressed issues other than redress, in recognition of the fact that redress is one of many issues of civil and human rights and social justice. For instance, we supported American Indians who faced forced removal by the government from their homes in Big Mountain, Arizona. We played an active role in the successful fight to block the appointment of redress foe Rep. Dan Lungren as California State Treasurer and opposed the nomination of arch-conservative Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. We condemned racist statements by high officials in Japan and supported protests by Koreans and other minorities in Japan for an end to discriminatory policies there.

In addition, at our 10th anniversary conference on Oct. 20 in Long Beach, we held workshops on a number of pressing issues facing the Japanese American community. They

included: political empowerment; building ties with other people of color; the future of the geographical Japanese American communities; access to higher education; and Nikkei culture. Furthermore, there are many other concerns that Japanese Americans need to address, such as the Civil Rights bill that President Bush recently vetoed, anti-Asian violence and discrimination, and the fast-growing tide of anti-Japanese sentiment linked to economic competition between U.S. and Japanese corporations. We may not be able to address all of these issues at the same time, but we do intend to address as many of them as our capabilities and local interest allows.

Changes in NCRR's Goals

In keeping with these changes, we have modified NCRR's goals. The new goals state: "The NCRR [new name] is a grassroots organization based in the Japanese American community that upholds the Constitutional, civil and human rights of Japanese Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans and all Americans. To this end NCRR shall:

- Seek complete and rapid implementation of redress measures and reparations payments related to the incarceration of Japanese Americans in 1942;
- Educate the American public so that future generations may learn from the mistakes of the past and not allow them to happen again;
- Support others who have suffered or still suffer from unjust actions;
- Further the political and cultural development and empowerment of the Japanese American and Asian/Pacific communities."

Organizational Changes

The campaign for the redress bill, which coincided with NCRR's first decade of work, provided us with a strong and urgent focus to our work. This singular focus was in many ways the glue which kept us together, despite our often loose or ad hoc organizational functioning. We have had no paid staff and lacked even much basic office equipment. Instead, we depended almost exclusively on the volunteer efforts and resources of our members and supporters.

We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish with such limited resources. But now that we are no longer in an "emergency, do-or-die" situation of the sort we faced with the redress bill, we believe we must move to establish a more solid organizational framework in order to sustain our work. For instance, while we will continue to rely mainly on volunteer efforts, a staff person hired on at least a part-time basis, with basic office equipment (computer, fax, etc.) in the central Los Angeles office, would be a big step forward. We also need to review our overall structure and chapter functioning with a view of moving toward more regular general meetings and elections of officers and more efficient keeping of membership and mailing list records. We should also systematize communications to our membership through a regular central or local newsletter or bulletin.

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An Invitation to Join With Us

If you agree with us on the need for an energetic, grassroots organization that will take up redress-related and other civil rights issues vital to Japanese Americans, we hope you will join with us. As in the past, we will only be as successful as our support is strong and deep. If you have suggestions or feedback on the perspectives we have presented here, we urge you to share them with us.

We encourage you to join with us in putting together our upcoming activities, such as the Day of Remembrance commemorations in February or in volunteering your help in whatever way you can. Also, if you have not yet renewed your membership for this year, we ask you to do so now.

Again, thank you very much for your support, your determination and your tireless efforts, without which redress would never have become a reality. We look forward to working closely with you in the years ahead to defend the rights of Japanese Americans and further the interests of all Americans.

Very truly yours,

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Radin Mawicki

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