

# APEN *Voices*



volume 6, number 1

## Moments in a Movement

APEN 2002 ANNUAL REPORT

Laotian Organizing Project

Asian Youth Advocates

Power in Asians Organizing

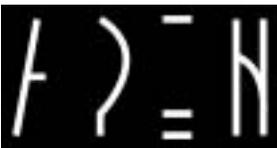
Multiracial Alliance Building

## ASIAN PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

The Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) seeks to strengthen the capacities of Asian Pacific Islander communities in the US through community organizing, leadership development and advocacy. And we strive to build pan-Asian grassroots organizations that will improve the health, well-being and political strength of our communities.

Community organizing is our central strategy to achieve environmental, social and economic justice. Our two local San Francisco Bay Area projects are the 8-year old Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) in Richmond, which also houses the Asian Youth Advocates program for young women, and the year-old Power in Asians Organizing (PAO) working with the pan-Asian immigrant community in Oakland.

To impact systemic change at the regional, state and national levels, APEN also employs the strategies of building a network of API organizations and long-term multiracial alliances.



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## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

“The environmental justice movement is the confluence of three of America’s greatest challenges: the struggle against racism and poverty; the effort to preserve and improve the environment; and the compelling need to shift social institutions from class division and environmental depletion to social unity and global sustainability.” 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

Environmental justice expands traditional notions of the environment and the environmental movement beyond wildlife conservation and open space preservation to include people as part of the equation. *The environment is where we live, work and play.* This holistic approach seeks to create **sustainable communities** and a **sustainable economy** so that people of all races, income and cultures live and work in environments that are decent, safe, healthy and affordable.

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# Welcome!

## A message from the Board Chair



Dear Friends of APEN,

We are in the midst of tough and troubling times. I heard a talk given by Professor John Hurst who was addressing a group of social justice popular educators. He described this period as rapidly moving toward what he calls “corporate-tocracy” a system of government driven by corporate interests and fanatic nationalism. I was struck by his comments and how, in the name of homeland security, we are witnessing a rapid erosion of democracy. For me, this affirms the importance of grassroots organizing in stopping this erosion and turning “the ship” around. APEN, PAO, LOP, and AYA and the environmental justice movement have critical roles in this effort. War, US economic interests and homeland security cannot be an excuse to weaken environmental protection nor an excuse to neglect the need for vibrant local economies that provide for decent jobs, quality schools, health care, and affordable housing. Homeland security should not be an excuse to harass, interrogate and detain people for their race or political principles.

On the flip side, resistance is growing. Political activism, and the emergence of “peace” cities around the world and across the country are evidence. Millions have taken to the streets, a call to “wage peace.” We at APEN believe that waging peace and our daily struggle for environmental justice are intimately linked. The root of these struggles are the same and it calls for us to redouble our efforts to organize a multiracial movement that prioritizes public good over profit, and eliminates inequality and injustice. Unfortunately, since 9/11, resources are scarce, especially for grassroots environmental organizations and networks. This has serious implications for the health and welfare of our communities.

Last October 2002, over 1,300 people met to participate in the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. The talent and expertise was deep, spanning generations, race, sectors (grassroots, legal, academic, government). Three resolutions from the floor were passed that should serve as a compass for our movement. These include the Principles of

*Working Together, Principles of Working with Youth, and Resolution Against the War. The leadership of the grassroots was reaffirmed, along with guidance on how joint work, support and resources can be shared and nurtured. In this period, I would encourage all who participated at the Summit to seek each other out and find ways to partner and provide mutual support in response to these difficult economic and political times. I understand that due to the scarcity of dollars, programs may need to be prioritized and even scaled back. My concern is that we not lose the unity and relationships that were developed at the Summit, and that instead, we are able to strengthen our ability to keep in touch, speak out together against environmental racism, and facilitate coordinated efforts and actions. A few weeks after returning from D.C., the Farmworker Network launched a border action for economic and immigrant rights. Many farmworkers were arrested. Because of the relationship developed at the Summit, the Laotian Organizing Project sent a moving message of solidarity. This action gave the Farmworkers a boost in knowing that others were monitoring their situation and supported their effort.*

Recently, APEN launched major campaigns for tenant rights, affordable housing and education about healthy homes. In upcoming issues of our newsletter, expect to learn more about how “housing” is an environmental justice issue in communities of color and how LOP, AYA and PAO will be organizing community folks, proposing policy recommendations and coalition-building with other sectors including religious, labor, and other EJ and social justice organizations. Our spirits are high despite these difficult times. Our best to everyone in 2003.

*Peace and Solidarity,*

*Pam Tau Lee  
Board Chair*



## My Home is My Environment: The Housing Crisis as the Next EJ Battle

By Jenny Lin

*In the past decade, the environmental justice movement radically changed our notion of the environment by recognizing communities as part of the environment, and that our community environments are where we live, work and play. According to the Healthy Homes Partnership, most people spend over 90% of their time indoors. For this majority, the indoor environment – the home – is the primary space in which we live, work and play. And in low-income communities, communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, that environment is threatened.*

*In 2002, APEN identified housing as the primary concern for our communities in both Richmond and Oakland. We surveyed 133 households in the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) and Power in Asians Organizing (PAO) on their housing needs and conditions. We found that housing is remains a primary concern for residents in Oakland and Richmond. The youth members of Asian Youth Advocates (AYA), also identified and analyzed how they were affected by poor conditions and high costs of housing, and drafted a youth statement on affordable housing. The surveys and writings were analyzed with other demographic and economic data on residents and housing in the San Francisco Bay Area, and are being compiled into a community housing report. Personal interviews from residents are currently being conducted to better understand the conditions and personal stories of community members, and will be included in the final report. Below is a brief excerpt of the report set for release in September.*

**ABOVE:**  
The Stop  
Chinatown Eviction  
Committee  
protests to keep  
affordable housing  
in Oakland's  
Chinatown

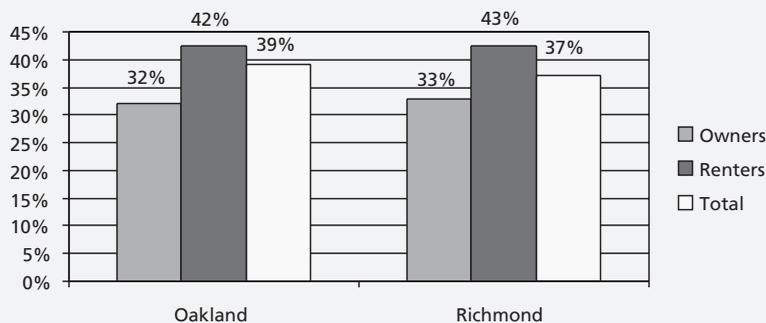
Open the newspaper today and the story around housing in the San Francisco Bay Area most likely touts a continuing drop in rents and the amazing resilience of the housing market: “Bay Area Rents Cheaper,” “Bay Area Home Prices Stabilizing.” However **the most recent media messages on housing obscure the direct experience of many low-income, immigrant and refugee families.** For them, finding and staying in safe and affordable housing hasn’t become any easier—in fact, in many cases people have experienced worsening economic and physical conditions. Unaffordable (and sometimes illegal) rent increases, overgrowth of mold, broken windows and doors that go unfixed, overcrowding, evictions, and other housing problems continue to plague low income Asian and Pacific Islander communities like the two communities profiled in this report.

### Overburdened by Housing Costs

According to an assessment by the National Low Income Housing Coalition in 2003, the Oakland Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes Oakland and Richmond, was ranked the **4<sup>th</sup> most expensive place to live** in the country. Rising housing costs mean that the hourly wage needed to rent and afford a market-rate, 2-bedroom apartment in the Oakland and Richmond area was approximately \$26.42/hour in 2003. According to our survey of low-income Asian communities, in Richmond housing costs increased an average of 40% over the past 3 years; in Oakland, the increase was 26%—all the while inflation only increased less than 7%.<sup>1</sup>

Conventional household budgeting suggests that financially healthy households pay no more than 30% of their income on housing. Because housing is such a high proportion of household costs in the Oakland Metropolitan Area, many pay more than they can economically afford on housing—which makes them “overburdened” because they pay more than 30% of their income on rent (Figure A). While renters have a higher rate than owners of being overburdened, over the past 10 years the percentage of overburdened owners is actually on the rise.

**Figure A: Overburdened by Housing Costs, 2000**



Our own survey within the low-income Asian and Pacific Islander population in Oakland and Richmond found that the rate of housing burden is even higher: **62% of those polled in Richmond and 50% of those polled in Oakland are “overburdened” by housing costs** because they pay more than 30% of their income on rent.

### Unsafe Housing Conditions

Too often, the lack of affordable housing during a tight housing market means owners have less incentive to invest in repairs and other improvements on their housing stock. Some residents must then endure unsafe conditions as a consequence of relatively low rent; however, residents themselves are unfairly forced to sacrifice their in-home health and safety in order to live within their means.

For instance, an estimated 71% of Oakland’s occupied housing units and 58% of Richmond occupied housing units are **contaminated with lead-based paints**.<sup>2</sup> This hazard is especially dangerous for families with children, for whom lead poisoning can cause “learning disabilities, behavioral problems, mental retardation, and stunted growth.”<sup>3</sup>

Asian and Pacific Islander families may be un-duely burdened by a lack of repairs and the persistence of unsafe conditions. In Oakland, the 2000 Census found that almost **17% of those without plumbing facilities were Asian and Pacific Islander households** even though Asians and Pacific Islanders make up 15% of the total population.<sup>4</sup>

Within APEN’s own survey population, over 1/3 of respondents in Oakland’s survey cited health and safety problems in the community’s housing stock, including chipping paint, household mold that could cause childhood asthma, and the lack of sink, toilet, or water access. Over half (59%) cited a problem with cockroaches and mice—which can also cause and exacerbate childhood asthma conditions. In Richmond, a larger proportion of respondents cited health and safety problems.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Survey Respondents in Richmond Cite Prevalent Home Health and Safety Problems**

	<b>Richmond</b>
Problems with mold (asthma trigger)	63%
Problems with peeling paint (lead poisoning trigger)	58%
Plumbing problems	48%
Broken windows and doors	52%
Cockroaches and mice (asthma trigger)	79%
Gas leaks	52%

Given these problems with repairs and health conditions with the homes, it is disturbing that these conditions may go un-fixed. Over half of the renters in Oakland and Richmond felt **uncomfortable going to their landlord** to report needed repairs. A larger percent in Oakland (72%) also felt **uncomfortable going to city inspectors and departments** to report unhealthy or unsafe housing conditions, while in Richmond most were not aware that they could report egregious housing concerns and problems to the city buildings inspections department for repair; only 29% know they can go to the city inspector to report these conditions. Because most city inspection programs run on a complaint-driven basis, these findings highlight the probable under-reporting of health and safety conditions in the home.

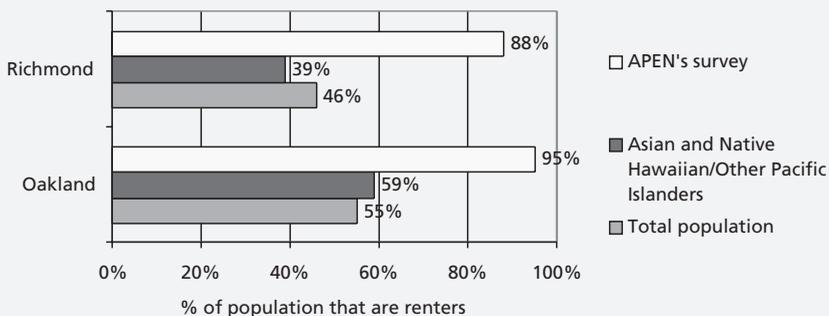


## Evictions

According to the 2000 Census, close to half of residents in both cities are renters (See Figure B). However, these rental rates in many ways do not reflect the status of low-income Asians in our organizing neighborhoods: **Within APEN's survey population, 95% of households in Oakland are renters, and 88% of households in Richmond are renters.**

APEN staff surveys East Oakland resident on current housing conditions

**Figure B: High proportion of renters**



Furthermore, almost three in ten Oakland renters and two in ten of Richmond renters surveyed had received a 30-day notice or been evicted in the past 3 years. A higher percentage (37% in Oakland and 48% in Richmond) said they *knew someone* in the community who had received a 30-day notice.<sup>6</sup> This is happening to low-income API families who are long-term residents of the community: in Oakland, the average number of years people have lived in the city was 11.5 years; in Richmond, it was over 17 years.

## Tough Choices Between Necessities

Because housing comprises such a high proportion of a household's monthly costs, many households are forced to make tough choices and sacrifices to accommodate this expense.

**Table 2: Making Tough Choices to Accommodate Housing Costs**

	Oakland	Richmond
Cut back on good food	68%	71%
Cut back on healthcare	42%	42%
Cut back on things for children (clothing, notebooks)	59%	60%
Forced to move because the rent was too high	45%	40%

<sup>1</sup> Note: The actual average increase in rent over the past 3 years may be higher. The average cited here does not include “outliers” of households who reported increases in rent above 100% over the past 3 years. Inflation rate for 2003 is based on the index value for March 2003.

<sup>2</sup> These estimates are based on calculating 90% of units built before 1940, 80% of units built between 1940-1959, and 62% of units built between 1960-1979. These estimates should be interpreted carefully given that the amount of lead may vary, that lead based paint becomes a hazard only when lead is released from the paint, and that these estimates are national averages that do not take into account differences based on region and other factors. (City of Oakland Consolidated Plan, 2000-2005). However, even given these caveats for interpretation, data showing the elevated levels of lead poisoning in many low-income communities of color means that the issue remains a top housing health and safety concern for many cities.

<sup>3</sup> Health Children Organizing Project, San Francisco, CA. “Reducing lead in your home.” Pamphlet.

<sup>4</sup> Census 2000, SF-3.

<sup>5</sup> The survey asked participants to cite both health and safety problems they experienced directly, as well as what they observed in other people’s homes. See footnote 6.

<sup>6</sup> While secondary recall of other households who have experienced evictions is less reliable—given that 5 households could know the same 1 household that had experienced an eviction, asking respondents to recall evictions in the community in general begin to help us understand the extent to which evictions are a problem in Oakland and Richmond.

Because some households are currently sacrificing nutrition, healthcare, and the needs of their children in order to fulfill housing costs each month, the longer term consequences of these sacrifices will have a broader effect on the community *beyond* just the need for more safe and affordable housing. In this way, excessive housing costs and safety problems have a ripple effect that further impacts the health, education, and employment needs of the surrounding community.

### **“PULL OUT THE ROOTS”—Solving Regional Problems with Localized Solutions**

In order to address the serious housing needs in our communities, community members and leaders are looking to solutions that address the root causes and truly “pull out the roots” of the housing problems they face. By focusing on solutions that will a) counter the profit motives of the current housing market, b) encourage government accountability to provide for safe and affordable housing, and c) engage community members in the political process—housing campaigns in Oakland and Richmond seek to tackle housing problems at its roots.

These solutions include providing for basic renter protections in Richmond. With residents moving an average of four times during their time in Richmond, the burdens of instability and the unfairness of being given “30 days” to seek alternative housing puts undue strain on immigrant and refugee families struggling just to make it. Creating a more stable and secure environment for renters means providing for basic rights against unfair and unwarranted evictions.

Engaging residents in plans and developments happening in their own neighborhoods is another solution in Oakland. With several market rate condominiums cropping up in and around the Chinatown and East Lake neighborhoods where many low-income API residents reside, the fear is that gentrification and displacement will result if no provisions are made to provide more safe and affordable housing in these communities.

The housing crisis in the San Francisco Bay Area is far from over. And the crisis impacting this region is happening to low-income communities, immigrant and refugee communities, and communities of color in regions across the country. We at APEN know that the housing crisis is the next major environmental justice battle to be waged. What we win here will send clear and hopeful signals to other regions in crisis and lessons on which to build.



## Developing The Laotian Organizing Project's Housing Campaign

By LOP Organizers

In 2002, LOP made the critical decision to focus on issues of safe, healthy, and affordable housing. Leading up to the recent launch of its housing justice campaign, LOP engaged in an in-depth campaign development and political education process with leaders and members in 2002 and early 2003. We'd like to share with you a few highlights and glimpses into the lives of LOP members in the quest for building sustainable and empowered communities. We invite you to read on to experience some of LOP's moments in building a movement.

**February 20-** Torm and May, LOP's community organizers, lead an outreach training to prepare leaders to outreach to members for the campaign launch. The lively group responds to the question, "What are the challenges to getting people involved?"

**ABOVE:**  
LOP leader, May Sio Saechao, affirms her support for the campaign

*"When we talk to people, we shouldn't just say, we're here helping Torm and May call to let you know about this meeting. We need to be passionate. We need to talk from our hearts about why we are involved, that we care about our community, and motivate them to come by our example."*

*-Thongsoun Puthama, Campaign Planning Committee (CPC)*

**March 14-** During the month, a series of monolingual member meetings in Lao, Khmu, and Mien are hosted at the LOP office. At the meetings, members brainstorm solutions to three main problems areas in the housing crisis: 1) lack of affordable housing; 2) lack of protections for renters; and 3) lack of information and services.

At one meeting of about fifteen people, Torm says,

*“Let’s think of our housing problems like a weed that’s growing, getting bigger and bigger, and choking our garden, our community. Here is a picture of it. [He points to a visual of a green plant with three stems but no leaves.] What are some of the problems we’ve talked about before?”*

Slow to respond at first, the group begins to shout out at once, *“Can’t find housing that we can afford!” “High rent!” “Get kicked out for no reason!” “Can’t get service in our language.”*

As people shout out, Torm pins the leaves, representing the problems, on the plant, with both Lao and English writing on them. He continues, *“Where do these problems come from? If we solve one of these problems, cut off one leaf, will we solve our community’s problems?”* One man answers, *“No, cut off the stem!”* May responds, *“What do you all think...you were farmers...if you cut the stem will the plant die?”* The group is bubbling with ideas and soon everyone is excited and yelling **“You have to go to the roots!!!”** May and Torm are laughing, **“YES!”** and they pull off a piece of paper from the visual to reveal roots of the housing problems.

**April 17-** A group of 22 active members convene to discuss campaign recommendations from the past months’ member meetings and listen to a presentation from youth in order to develop a recommendation for LOP’s campaign.

LOP leaders present campaign recommendations at community meeting



The adult members are nodding their heads as 15-year old Chan Boonkeut and 17-year old

Saengthip Keosaeng, two leaders from Asian Youth Advocates, our youth organizing program, speak confidently. *“Housing is a youth issue...When rent is too high, people can’t afford rent on their own so a few families have to live together. Some of the impacts of overcrowding...for youth it means a home where it is difficult to study.”*

May 2 - LOP holds a community meeting of approximately fifty people, including members, leaders, and West County allies. Together, we affirm that LOP will pursue a campaign protect tenants from unfair evictions.

John Dalrymple of the Contra Costa Central Labor Council speaks (then is interpreted and translated into two other languages) to an attentive LOP member audience, who is excited by the potential of working across races, communities, and sectors together. *“There are over 14,000 union members in Richmond... I want to thank you, LOP, for helping us pass a living wage in the City of Richmond last year. That victory shows what we can accomplish when we work together...My organization looks forward to working together with all of you around the housing problems in our city.”*

Tsan Seng, a 84 year old Mien member, who always wears a traditional turban covering her hair, holds the microphone and won’t let go until she’s done speaking, not even giving May a chance to interpret into Lao and English until she’s finished. *“ I think these are very important problems, our housing problems. I am an old woman, and I have had to move six times in the past few years. It’s not right to make old people like me move...”*

With her fist raised, AYA leader Saengthip shouts, *“We are with you LOP!!!”*

Break-out groups in different languages give the opportunity for rich sharing to discuss the campaign recommendation of tenants’ protection against unfair evictions. *“My family & I were forced to move for no reason. The landlord gave us a 30 day notice and we no choice but to leave. I had already finished planting my garden for the year and was looking forward to harvesting my vegetables and fruits this year. I couldn’t take them with me...”* says one Mien member.

A member from each break-out group holds up a green card to show support for the “tenant protections against unfair evictions”



solution. Recently active member, Norry, captures the spirit of the moment, *“Now we have affirmed our campaign to focus to fight against unfair evictions. Let’s move on—our allies are here and we are ready! Let’s go back to our community and tell everyone that they need to fight against this injustice!”*

**REFLECTIONS: LOP’s Principles & Approach**

These glimpses into the life of LOP shed light on our vision for justice. Our new housing justice campaign links the depth and

# LOP AWARDED Leadership for a Changing World

In Fall 2002, LOP staff received the Ford Foundation’s Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) award that recognizes innovative leadership for social change in local communities around the country. In March 2003, LOP staff and other awardees traveled to the Columbia River Gorge area in the Pacific Northwest for LCW’s second program-wide meeting for recipients to share experiences. LOP had the opportunity to tour the area to more deeply understand the cultural, economic, and political context facing fellow awardee, Don Sampson of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. The fascinating day touring fish hatcheries and hydro-electric dams culminated in a salmon feast hosted by the Native tribe living at Celilo, or *Wy-am*, site of former traditional fishing grounds, since flooded by dams. LOP staff was humbled and inspired by the generosity and spirit of our hosts. *“Being at the village reminded me of the refugee camps back in Thailand. The conditions are so poor, but the people are so rich in spirit. Our communities have a lot in common. Everyone should know what is happening here.”* noted May Phan, LOP organizer. LOP staff is grateful to be

learning and exchanging experiences with other organizations from across the United States.

**Monitoring the Multi-lingual Telephone Warning System**

The Laotian language pilot of the multi-lingual Emergency Telephone Ring Down System (ETRDS) is near completion! With the pilot project wrapping up, Laotian-speaking residents in West Contra Costa County can receive a call in their own language in the event of an emergency. On March 28<sup>th</sup>, a community celebration was held to kick off ETRDS and announce information about the system.

LOP’s successful campaign, 1999-2001, fought to secure ETRDS and its funding so that non-English speaking residents in Richmond are notified in the event of an industrial accident and the necessary emergency procedures. For the past two years, LOP has helped find funding for ETRDS and supported the implementation of the Laotian pilot project of the system. Contra Costa County will expand the system to other languages, such as Spanish, to fulfill its promise to inform non-English speaking residents.

growth of our grassroots community leadership, the principles of environmental justice, and a multi-racial and multi-sector movement that will bring about environmental and social change and justice for all communities.

### **Continuing the fight for the basic rights of healthy communities where we live, work, and play.**

The focus on winning protections against unfair evictions for renters strongly affirms what environmental justice is all about: fighting for basic rights to protect our communities where we live, work, and play. The Laotian refugee community here has struggled for nearly 20 years now to rebuild and grow roots in this Richmond/San Pablo community. Despite the conditions of resettlement, poverty, and toxic exposure, this community has protected a major asset—a deep sense of community, with rich family and social networks that act as a social and cultural safety net for families. When a family is forced to leave the area because they have been unfairly evicted or cannot afford the high rents, that family faces not only a tough rental market, but also potential isolation and disconnection from family, culture, and community. Everyone has a basic right to continue to live in their communities.

We see the connections between housing issues, including tenant protection, quality of housing, the location of housing near polluters and public resource allocation, and the role of corporate power and government accountability. Our focus on housing reflects the tenets of environmental justice—principles of building democratic participation, holding government and corporations accountable to the people, and demanding justice for communities of color and low-income communities.

### **Growing and deepening grassroots leadership—within, across, & between the generations.**

The energy, passion, and voices of our members is the heart of LOP. LOP grows stronger with each person who shares in our collective vision of justice for our communities. Recently, AYA and LOP leaders have had exciting opportunities to work together to determine the campaign focus. Engaging whole families is a powerful way for LOP to explore the potential of intergenerational work.

### **Building diverse multi-tribal, multi-racial, and multi-sector alliances and movement.**

LOP is actively working with several multiracial and multisector organizations to advance a progressive environmental and social justice agenda, including a campaign focused on tenant's protection. The Greater Richmond Interfaith Program, an interfaith and homeless service organization, Richmond Vision 2000 of Faithworks!, an interfaith, labor, and community coalition, and the Contra Costa Central Labor Council are a few of the key organizations with which LOP is partnering. Joining forces will give LOP a broader impact on the county and region.

# In Our Own Words: Asian Youth Advocates Insights on Housing

By AYA Members

With the launch of APEN’s housing justice campaigns, Asian Youth Advocates (AYA) has also been busy examining the issue of healthy, safe and affordable housing, and asking questions, such as “How does housing affect youth?” and “Is housing a youth issue?” As part of the campaign and political education process, the girls completed a project examining their own housing experiences and solutions to the housing crisis.

## AYA’s Housing Conditions

We learned about the housing conditions that we, AYA members, live in and must cope with on a daily basis. In the past four to five years, many of us have moved as many as four times, not only changing and disrupting our home environments, but our school and social environments as well. Large families, sometimes made up of 8-9 people, are crowded into small apartments and houses. And with overcrowding, homes also have many uninvited guests: cockroaches, roaches and mold. As cabinets break, stairways become unsafe, and bathrooms clog, most landlords do not make any of the necessary repairs.

*“In 1997, I lived in a two room apartment on Barrett Avenue. We are four children, including myself, and our parents. All of the kids had to share one room. We moved into that 2-room apartment because rent in our other apartment had raised in price...It was very crowded and I barely had privacy. Our neighborhood wasn’t good either. People would be outside of our doors gambling and throwing dice around. It sometimes would scare me when they’d get loud because I’d think they would get into arguments and do something to our windows.” -Saengthip Keosaeng*

## AYA Highlights

2002 was a busy year- full of leadership growth and alliance building with other youth groups. During the 2nd National Environmental Leadership Summit in October 2002 in Washington DC, six AYA leaders contributed to the strong and organized youth voice at the Summit that helped develop the “Youth Principles of EJ” and “Youth Principles of Collaboration.” In February, we had a reunion in San Francisco with the other Bay Area youth groups that attended the Summit, including the Chinese Progressive Association, People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights, Youth United for Community Action, Ma’at Youth Academy, GreenAction, Literacy for Environmental Justice, and Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. The reunion was a great opportunity for us to re-connect with our youth allies and continue to build youth organizing power in the Bay Area.



## Impact of housing situation on youth and families

We also shared with each other the many ways housing affects us and our families. It's difficult for our parents who work low wage jobs to pay the high rents in the Bay Area. Sometimes our parents have to work more than one job to pay the bills, taking away from time spent with our families.

*"My mom struggles a whole lot because she works at a job that doesn't pay enough, therefore when she gets paid, all the money goes to the rent. She doesn't have enough to support her two children or herself... Things are expensive because now that we live in a house, there's the rent, water bill, phone bill, electricity bill and gas."* -Jessica Thongtap

Many sacrifices are made so our parents can pay the rent and put food on the table. It hurts us to see our parents struggling so that we can have a place to live and food to eat.

A poor living environment also affects our moods and attitudes. Sometimes we're embarrassed to bring friends over because our home environment is unsafe or overcrowded. Our parents work long hours or two jobs and aren't home often or around much to help us with homework or offer support.

*"It makes me feel as if I don't want to be home because everything is falling apart. Sometimes it's stressful but I deal with it."* -Cindee Chan Boonkeut

## What Changes are Needed?

We believe that many changes need to be made in our housing environment. Our ideas for change include rent affordability, community investment in keeping the neighborhood clean and safe and increasing salaries to a living wage.

*"[I would change] the rent price because I think that affects a lot of people. I mean how are the government or business people going to raise up the rent price? If they're going to do that then raise the paychecks... people who get paid don't even have enough for rent."* -Jessica Thongtap

AYA presents housing statement at LOP meeting

**AYA joins LOP’s Housing Justice Campaign**

In early 2003, we began participating in LOP’s campaign planning. Through our housing issues project, we concluded that housing is a youth issue and deeply affects the entire community - youth and adults! As a group, we finalized our own statement on housing (*see Statement*), outlining the reasons why housing is a youth issue and root causes of the housing crisis. At an April LOP meeting, two AYA leaders, Saengthip Keosaeng and Chan Bookeut, presented the AYA Statement on Housing to LOP leaders and discussed our proposed solutions: (1) rent control, (2) better maintained housing and (3) protection against unfair evictions. Through the various exchanges between AYA and LOP, we are learning that we can come together as a team.

**AYA Statement about How Housing Impacts Youth**

**Housing is a youth issue because:**

Our parents with low-incomes have to get more than 1 job to support the family. We don’t get to see our parents. And, our parents have less time to help us with schoolwork and other things in life. Sometimes we have to get jobs to support our family and we have to sacrifice extracurricular activities and a social life. We all end up working harder to keep the house that we’re not spending much time in.

When rent is too high, people can’t afford rent on their own so a few families have to live together. Some of the impacts of overcrowding are lack of privacy and lack of personal space, which for youth means a home where it is difficult to study.

Our houses are in poor condition and it’s hard to show who we really are. For instance, it is difficult to bring friends over because we are embarrassed about our living conditions.

Once we sum up the housing issue, housing is not just an adult issue, it’s also a youth issue because we live there.

**We think the root causes are:**

- 1) the Government is giving up on poor people. And they are only paying attention to rich people.
- 2) Developers—people who buy land, who build housing, who are generally in the housing business—make most of the money.
- 3) Landlords—they raise rent prices real high—make some of the money.

**Solutions we propose:**

Protection for renters! Some ideas are:

- 1) Rent Control – keep rent prices not too high so that people can afford to live.
- 2) Better maintained, better looking housing where people are getting their money’s worth – houses we can live in. We want our housing to be nice with clean carpet, clean walls, etc.
- 3) Protection against unfair eviction – because no one wants to get kicked out of their house.
- 4) More permanently affordable housing! People with lower-incomes should have lower rents.

# LOP & AYA Members



## INTRODUCING TWO FAMILY TEAMS!

**Fou Yarn Saeteurn**, age 71, and **May Sio Saechao**, age 64, are Mien and are caretakers for their two infant grandchildren. Both Fou Yarn and May Sio were refugees from Laos and now live in San Pablo, CA. Fou Yarn is involved with LOP because he wants to do something to help his community. May Sio thinks rents are too high and became interested when she heard that LOP was working on housing justice issues.

According to Fou Yarn, LOP is the “center” that gives us “Mien people” a chance to come together and fight for solutions

to our problems. He hopes LOP can win its housing justice campaign because it will make a crucial difference in the community. May Sio feels LOP work is valuable because it brings the community together to fight for housing rights. She believes that it is important to hold the government accountable to poor people, and hopes they can win the campaign to move towards solving bigger problems, like making rent more affordable.



## LOP’s Father-Daughter Team!

**Khamseng Keoseang**, 48, is an LOP member and also Saengthip’s father. Khamseng came from Laos and now lives in Richmond, CA. He works with Lao Senior as an Outreach Worker and originally got involved with LOP to help the people improve their lives and health. He believes LOP’s work is important because it brings people together to gain more people power to fight for their rights. LOP also helps the community gain more knowledge about our rights. Khamseng hopes to win the campaign against unfair evictions for the people in Richmond/San Pablo.



**Saengthip Keosang** is one of AYA’s leaders. She is 17 years old and a student at Richmond High School. Her family is originally from Laos, but she was born in Thailand. For 13 years, Saengthip and her family have lived in Richmond, CA. Saengthip joined AYA three years ago during the summer between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She quickly emerged as one of AYA’s leaders and even named her incoming AYA group, “Inner Strength.”

During her time in AYA, Saengthip’s most memorable moments were learning about lead poisoning where her grandparents had been living and growing food for over 10 years, and warning them about eating vegetables grown in that soil; fighting to set up a Teacher Advisory Program at Richmond High School, feeling like AYA did something concrete and significant; and participating in the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, learning about the conditions and challenges people face in the struggle for environmental and social justice around the country.



## Building Housing Justice in Oakland

By PAO Organizers

A Chinese New Year resolution says: “A good start is half way to success.” In the year 2002, PAO was born, built up its membership and launched a housing justice campaign, having an initial victory in helping to pass a Just Cause ordinance in Oakland to protect renters from unfair eviction.

### Developing Community Leadership

PAO’s community residents are monolingual low-income Asian immigrants. They are seniors, mothers and fathers, factory and restaurant workers, janitors, and healthcare providers. Most are long-term Oakland residents – having lived here for an average of 10-11 years – but new to the process of civic participation.

PAO’s community campaign efforts began in November 2002 through our multi-lingual efforts to register, educate and turnout voters for the elections. On election day, over 400 Oakland residents, including many of our members, voted for the first time. In the beginning of 2003, we took steps towards developing our leaders to move to organizing on the next level for affordable housing in Oakland. After participating in many trainings to prepare for our big and small member meetings, our leaders not only actively participate in meetings, but they also have taken leadership roles as member recruiters and meeting facilitators.

In just one year, we have grown tremendously- our membership base now includes 118 members, with over 40 active members who

**ABOVE:** PAO members approve new affordable housing campaign consistently attend meeting and activities. At our last big member meeting, over 30 active members and leaders committed themselves to become members of a Working Committee for a one year commitment. It is clear that our solid core of leaders and members remain actively involved and committed to advancing PAO’s housing justice campaign.

We can see how our leaders have grown in past months. Their leadership skills, confidence, and political consciousness have moved to the organizing committee level, PAO's leadership body. In the beginning of the year, when our leaders were reporting back to members from our small group brainstorm discussions, some still felt a little intimidated to speak in front of a large group of members. However, two months later, changes in our leaders' demeanor were apparent. All leaders stood up without any hesitation, reported back clearly on what had happened at the small survey meeting, and gave their recommendation to work on more affordable housing rather than healthy homes. In March, in front of city council members, city officers, and new neighbors at a City Redevelopment meeting, with the help of interpreters, our leaders voiced their concerns on affordable housing without feeling embarrassed or intimidated. Later in the meeting, we encountered District 2 council member, Danny Wan, and our members spoke to him directly (Danny Wan speaks Mandarin) and invited him to our next meeting to listen to our concerns. With confident leaders and strong

## PAO FIGHTS PACIFIC RENAISSANCE EVICTIONS

PAO's campaign to keep affordable housing in Oakland is well underway! 50 tenants who live in the Pacific Renaissance Plaza in the heart of Chinatown are faced with an eviction notice from owner, Lawrence Chan, a multi-millionaire giant who owns the Oakland Marriott Hotel and the Oakland Courtyard by Marriott Hotel and runs the Oakland Convention Center. He also owns the Parc 55 hotel in San Francisco, the Park Lane Hotel in Hong Kong, and many other properties worldwide. As a concession for taking this land from the community and taxpayer funds, he promised 50 units of affordable rental housing for the community. \$7 million dollars of our tax funds directly went to Lawrence Chan for building the plaza 10 years ago. The taxpayers TRUSTED that this loan money was returned to the city, but today we see that none of the money was returned and 50 families are being evicted.

Working with the Stop the Chinatown Evictions committee that includes tenant leaders, Just Cause Oakland, East Bay Community Law Center, Oakland Tenants Union, CJWP and United Seniors, PAO is determined to stop the evictions, increase developer accountability to the city and the community and preserve the 50 units as PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING for the community!

Our low-income, elderly, and disabled members who have language barriers and need culturally specific services, CANNOT just pick up and move! We need PERMANENTLY affordable housing in our communities. These evictions jeopardize the health and sustainability of our communities. We're not talking about luxuries but survival—a roof over your head, being able to go to a doctor who speaks your language. These families have the right to stay in their homes.

voices, now we are very sure that our members and leaders are ready for the campaign.

**Plan of Action**

PAO realized that in order to win more affordable housing in Oakland, we had to win the support of the city’s elected officials first. At our last leaders meeting, we developed a plan of action to win the support of Oakland City council members and State Assembly Representatives. Our plan includes: 1) meeting with city council members and Assembly member to express our concerns about affordable housing in Oakland; 2) building community support with two postcard drives and collecting 1200 postcards from community members supportive of our campaign; and 3) inviting city council members to meet with us, to share with them what we have learned and our results from our postcard drive.



ABOVE:  
PAO organizer,  
Amber Chan,  
and leader,  
Mei Fang Guo,  
speak at  
community  
meeting

During the meeting, PAO leaders recommended affordable housing as PAO’s campaign. All members accepted the recommendation and the plan of action by signing action cards committing them to further involvement. In total, fifty-seven members attended the meeting and 56 action cards were signed! We are amazed and very happy about our leaders’ and members’ level of commitment to PAO’s affordable housing campaign!

BELOW:  
PAO kids also  
participate in  
community  
meetings!

Organizing is never an easy job, but with PAO’s strong membership base and committed leadership all our hard work is worth it. Our members were ordinary, quiet Asian immigrants who took and swallowed unfair treatment without making any complaints because they came from countries with different systems, didn’t speak English, didn’t know their rights, and didn’t know where to get help. In one year, our members are organized and empowered; they know about their rights, they know they want a better Oakland, and they have united to form a collective voice. In the upcoming year, our next steps include motivating more Asians in Oakland to join us in establishing a stronger collective voice, gaining support from our elected city officials, and securing more affordable housing for our community.



2003 is the Year of the Sheep. It is already proving to be a good year for PAO’s continuing housing campaign work. We truly hope that we will have many successes that will help us to get to the other end of the road of housing justice!

# PAO MEMBERS

## Introducing Three of PAO's Emerging Leaders, Vicki Liu, Cang Ye & Ning Ba Chen

**Vickie Liu** is one of PAO's Cantonese leaders. She has lived in Oakland for seven years, and currently lives with a family of five in a one-bedroom apartment. Vickie joined PAO when she was given an unfair eviction notice from her landlord because she refused to pay her rent that was raised 60%. Instead, she organized seven neighbors from her apartment to fight the extremely high rent increase and eviction notices. Vicki won the battle, and



believes it is very important to have an organization like PAO to refer low-income Chinese and other Asians, like herself, to get help. She hopes the housing market becomes more stable and thinks the best solution is to have more available affordable housing. *"The city of Oakland should build more housing, not private companies, because private companies are only there for the profit."*

**Cang Ye** is one of PAO's Cantonese leaders. He was a high school teacher in China and now teaches a calligraphy class in the Chinese community. He describes PAO as an organization to "fly the flag for affordable housing." Cang Ye believes that if we really want to find long-term solutions to the housing problem, everybody needs to be involved. *"Businessmen and developers should see housing as a basic need, not as profit, so that we can have more affordable housing for the working class and low-income residents. The city government should provide more affordable housing to make sure people of Oakland have affordable and healthy homes. The state government should support the building of more affordable housing and jobs. The Bush government should not have started the war or have tax cuts, so we can save some money for affordable housing and jobs."*



**Ning Ba Chen** is one of PAO's Mandarin leaders. He and his wife live in a senior apartment building, and though he has not encountered any housing problems personally, Ning Ba has a greater vision for his community and became involved with PAO's work. He observed that a lot of people in Oakland had been getting evicted or living in poor conditions. *"There aren't enough good jobs in Oakland, so that even if people do have jobs, they have to work longer hours to pay for rent."* He believes PAO's work is important



because immigrant Chinese and other Asians need an organization to help others fight for affordable housing. As a PAO leader, Ning Ba organizes and motivates all tenants in his building to come to PAO's neighborhood meetings. He hopes that the community can come together and improve housing conditions in Oakland.



## A LETTER TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

*From October 23 – 26, 2002, over 1,300 environmental justice activists and advocates converged in Washington, D.C. for the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. Eleven years after the first landmark Summit was held, Summit II provided the space to celebrate and analyze our progress as an environmental justice movement over the last decade, and allowed the movement to set its directions for the next 10 years. APEN’s Board Chair, Pam Tau Lee, served on the Executive Committee in the planning of Summit II. In that role, she provided the necessary, invaluable and heartfelt leadership to ensure meaningful grassroots leadership and participation at the Summit. Here, we share her thoughts on what the Summit meant to her and what insights and lessons we as an EJ movement can take for the road ahead.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I was asked to share my thoughts regarding Summit II held last October in Washington, D.C. To be honest, I am still processing much of what I personally experienced. The period post-Summit II was a very sad time for me and for the EJ movement. Three strong sisters passed from this spirit world, they are Nilak Butler, Jan Stevens and Jeanne Gauna. Johnella Sanchez of Indian People Organized for Change shared with me a Lakota belief. When times become difficult, as they are now, the spirit world takes those who have worked hard, sacrificed and are deeply respected, to help the rest of us to be strong. Though the loss of Nilak, Jan and Jeanne is so very painful, we have their legacy and memories to learn from and to honor on a daily basis.

Over ten years ago Richard Moore spoke to our communities, to build “Net(works) That Work.” That call was answered with the founding of regional, sector, and networks based on race and ethnic groups, and youth

**ABOVE:**  
APEN marches  
with SNEEJ at  
Summit II in  
Washington DC

affiliations across the country. This work needs to continue, but as I was leaving D.C. at the conclusion of Summit II and the beginning of the escalation of the war on Iraq, my hope was that perhaps we could also explore, “Building Nets That Work Together.” No, I don’t know what that looks like. But, since the

conclusion of Summit II, our administration has waged war in Iraq; the U.S. has escalated military presence in the Middle East, Korea and the Philippines. My question is, by finding ways to do more work together, would we be increasing our ability to wage peace?

What does building connections between regional and networks based on sector or race look like? A few weeks after returning from D.C., I was excited to learn that Carlos Marentes from the Farmworker Network for Economic and Environmental Justice was elected to the leadership board of the Southern Organizing Committee. I myself am chair of APEN as well as an individual member of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, and take pride in being able to contribute to both organizations. But are there greater advantages from having these types of connections? On another level, I believe that lessons from community initiatives, such as LOP, PAO & AYA, have much to offer to API allies and to regional networks where API communities are wanting to become active on environmental justice issues. Documenting organizing lessons and sharing these across networks has interesting potential. As EJ grassroots organizations become better able to deepen and sustain indigenous leadership, I look forward to a time when multi-racial, ethnic, and tribal activities are more of the norm than the exception.

At the conclusion of Summit II, it was very clear that the EJ movement is very diverse! Youth, non-English speakers, urban residents, tribal representatives, students - sectors that were less present ten years ago - made their presence known ten years later. Through the working groups, a call was issued. "Build greater self-sufficient EJ leadership capacity," said the Summit II Movement Building Working Group. The Grassroots Organizing Working Group advocated for the establishment of grassroots leadership development training institutes. This helps to better identify the role professional EJ resource organizations can play when developing partnerships with grassroots organizations. For example, leadership development components include helping grassroots organizations develop a permanent technical infrastructure, sharing of resources, and long-term commitments to specific local or regional struggles. A leadership development institute based on principles of popular education that weaves the learning of technical skills with local indigenous knowledge to mobilize group action and directly challenge the root causes of environmental racism was proposed. Leadership development institutes would also facilitate greater multi-racial, ethnic, tribal, and intergenerational initiatives. Basis for these future partnerships are outlined in the "Principles of Working Together," drafted by the Collaboration Working Group and passed at Summit II. A group of over 20 people that reflected the diverse participation at the Summit worked day and night to draft this important document.

Prior to Summit II, I was fortunate to attend a pre-summit youth preparation meeting. At this meeting youth expressed their excitement at traveling to D.C. to *learn*. I was privately concerned that they might underestimate their ability to *teach*. My concerns

were unfounded, as witnessed by their fearless participation on Day 2 of the Summit, their energy, their thoughtfulness and then their humanity to reach out to heal any hurt their actions may have caused. Hanging in my office are photos of these youth. Their faces reflect their determination to fight for global peace and justice. They reflect spirit, art, music and faith. I believe they taught us all lessons that were felt on both a personal and institutional level, and for that, I am grateful.

During the preparation for the Summit and at the gathering, I had to work hard to keep from taking things personally. But I had to keep reminding myself, at the root of many of these difficult situations, were political (not personal) differences. This is true for all movements and the EJ movement is no different. These differences need to be addressed in a principled and political manner. Summit II participants demanded to establish a process for voting. The Executive Committee recommended that voting be based on “one person, one vote.” After several minutes of careful listening an alternative proposal was adopted that specified “one vote per grassroots organization or youth component.” The process for issuing vote cards was simple, based on respect and trust. This was just one of many moments that could have gotten out of control, but the distribution of the cards and voting that followed went on without a hitch. I believe that beneath all the tension was the collective will and strength to do the right thing.

The Summit opened up many of our eyes to what it really takes to build a multiracial, multicultural and multitribal movement based on principles and integrity. I would like to thank and acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the many individuals, organizations and networks that contributed to the Summit and setting the movement on its future course.

Peace and Unity,  
Pam Tau Lee

The elders of LOP stepped forward and conducted a “unity” ceremony. In this traditional ceremony, each person ties a string on the wrists of the person on each side.

The string symbolizes the ways in which we are all tied to one another.





## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR PEACE

By Martha Matsuoka and Joselito Laudencia

*“Bat yu hat ji! Yu fong ji!” shouted the members of the APEN contingent.*

*Amidst hundreds of others, APEN members marched through the streets of Oakland carrying signs in English and Chinese on April 5, 2003 in protest of the U.S.-led war against Iraq. The chant synced up with the beat of the Filipinos for Global Justice contingent. People shook their cans filled with rice to add to the growing clamor.*

*“What does that mean?” asked a marcher from the Service Employees International Union.*

*“It’s Cantonese. It means, ‘No to nuclear weapons! Yes to housing!’ ” Amber Chan, APEN’s Oakland organizer, exclaimed.*

In the past few years, community organizing in the United States has dramatically shifted. Although organizing institutions have traditionally expressed solidarity with and have made connections between local and international struggles, the events of September 11, 2001, and the Bush administration’s ensuing war agenda have instantly globalized local issues and conditions. Local groups now have to address the pressing global issues of the political moment. Through 2002, APEN struggled with how to make the connections with constituents. APEN discussed strategies with ally organizations, the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) and the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) in San Francisco, to link anti-war efforts to local campaigns.

“At CPA, we organized community residents to become informed and take action against the Bush administration’s war on the people and sovereignty of Iraq, and the war on our rights and domestic needs here in the US,” noted Anita Wheeler, CPA organizer.

ABOVE:  
PAO says “no” to  
war at Oakland  
peace rally



ABOVE:  
Korean  
Drummers  
lead People  
of Color con-  
tingent at  
Oakland  
peace march

CPA organized a community rally and march in Chinatown’s Portsmouth Square on February 16 in conjunction with the world-wide movement to stop US military aggression. Three hundred Chinese youth, seniors, workers and families turned out strong. Following the rally, CPA members developed a plan to build education in the Chinese community through weekly vigils, media outreach and mobilization to anti-war marches.

The relationships between US military and acts of aggression, the economy and democratic decision-making are clear. Opportunities exist now, more than ever, to develop political education strategies that involve all aspects of APEN – its members, leaders, staff, board, allies – so that we can share experiences and educate ourselves about the underlying agendas that divide and devastate our communities in the United States and abroad.

“Since September 11, 2001, political education about war has been an important part of AIWA’s work,” Stacy acknowledged. “In our Youth Build Immigrant Power Project, youth have led trainings about the history of US military intervention, and about the local and domestic impact of wars on immigrant communities. Among women members, we have discussed the media myths about the war in Iraq. Immigrant women were particularly moved by the possibility that their children could be drafted into a war that they don’t agree with.”

The war in Iraq forced us to sharpen our analysis of the global context of our work. First, we need to understand how the war, and in particular, the workings of our government and multinational corporate interests impact our communities. Second, we need to be conscious of how our strategies – both immediate and long term – maintain a sharp focus on the root causes of the problems in our communities - racism, undemocratic decision-making processes, and private profit over public good.

For members of APEN’s Laotian Organizing Project in Richmond, many of whom were displaced from Laos due to the U.S. war in Vietnam, the links of war abroad and at home are clear. May Phan, LOP Organizer, affirmed this reality. “We lived with uncertainty about our future and our children’s future after the war. Our families were separated and put into refugee camps in Thailand until

we were moved to the U.S. We thought we would have a better life in America, but here we're experiencing a different kind of war, a war against the poor and people of color".

For Asian and Pacific Islander communities, acts of US military aggression have defined our communities both here in the US and around the world. US military presence occupies and controls large areas in Okinawa, the Philippines, and South Korea. A long-standing presence, U.S. troops in these communities conduct military training, artillery practice and fuel the systems of worldwide sex trafficking, prostitution and violence against women and girls. From Laos to Baghdad, from Richmond to Dearborn, Michigan, Kahoolawe, Hawaii to Maehyangri, South Korea, our communities are linked by similar struggles for basic needs, such as fresh food, clean water and a livelihood, and rights for immigrants and refugees.

The anti-war work of our organizations provided the opportunity to expose this underlying global agenda of the United States. Sherman Ho, youth organizer with CPA's Common Roots Program, commented, "The role of the US, as an invader of Iraq, is to protect corporate interests—oil." Stacy Kono stated, "AIWA opposes the U.S. military intervention because we understand the same corporate structure that exploits and profits from immigrant workers is backing U.S. terror for profit."

The political and economic legacy of the war in Iraq and the protracted War on Terror will be deep and long-term. Severe budget cuts this year in response to an already short budget at the federal, state, and local levels continue to result in the slashing of critical needs such as education, housing, job training, health care and transportation.

"Youth were particularly clear that the resources directed towards war should be funding their education!" commented Stacy Kono, AIWA organizer. Mr. Bai Huo Huang, a CPA member leader, echoed Stacy's comments. "The military budget increases are directly affecting much-needed social services for seniors, including housing."

Reflecting on the impact of the anti-war efforts, Anita Wheeler recognized the importance of creating opportunities for education and action. "Our weekly vigils offered a space to reflect and challenge the mainstream media's misinformation on the war. Hundreds of community members organized to actively oppose the war and speak out their views. We see a definite need to build more education at the grassroots as to who really benefits from war and militarism and why we need to build a strong grassroots movement for peace and justice."

APEN's activism against Bush's war agenda is one piece of a longer-term agenda for environmental justice that ensures basic needs such as housing are met, that rights of workers, women, girls, are valued and addressed, decision-making rests in the many, rather than an elite few. Our work is both global and local. Our anti-war activities have reinforced our commitment to develop deep political leadership within our communities that will lay the groundwork for building a worldwide movement for peace and justice.



# APA's in California: Realities & Opportunities for Action

by Pronita Gupta and Joselito Laudencia

ABOVE:  
March against  
Chinatown  
evictions

California is at a crossroads. Its population has boomed, growing by 13.8% between 1990 and 2000, thereby outpacing the national growth rate.<sup>1</sup> The Asian Pacific American (APA) community, which comprises approximately 11% of California's population, is one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the state. Immigration is primarily responsible for this growth - with 66% of the APA population being foreign-born. In 2000 there were roughly one million "new" Asian immigrants in the state with over one-fifth coming from the combined areas of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneous to this population boom, California is facing a dire recession and a looming budget deficit of \$34.6 billion in 2003-04. This, combined with the overall national economic malaise and the war abroad against Iraq and now possibly other countries, has left the State with severe financial constraints to meet the needs of a growing and diverse population. While the incredible growth in the APA population, especially among new immigrants, is helping to enrich the social fabric of California, it is also poses new challenges for organizing during this time of economic uncertainty and limited public resources.

California continues to have the largest Asian Pacific American (APA) population in the country with 3,697,513 Asians and 116,961 Pacific Islanders.<sup>3</sup> While San Francisco County has the highest percentage of Asians (33%), Alameda County is one of four counties to experience major Asian population growth between 1990 and 2000.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Chinese community constitutes the largest Asian population in California. However, Asian Indians are the fastest growing group.

## SOCIAL & ECONOMIC REALITIES FOR APAS

### Language Barriers

The APA communities in California face tremendous language barriers. Almost 42% of the APA population speak English “less than very well.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, over 31% of APA households are linguistically isolated, meaning that all the members of the household over the age of 14 have some difficulty speaking English. These numbers are actually an undercount since they do not reflect any of the South Asian languages that are placed in another language category.

Language access programs are some of the critical services being cut or eliminated as the State deals with shrinking federal dollars and growing budgetary problems.

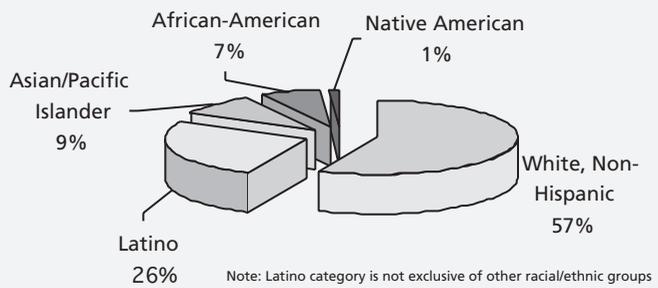
### Income and Poverty<sup>6</sup>

While Asian median household income of \$55,366 and Pacific Islander median household income of \$48,650 are greater than the state’s median household income of \$47,493, there are significant disparities between the wealthy and the poor. Over 23% of Asian households and 22% of Pacific Islander households earned less than \$25,000 in 1999.

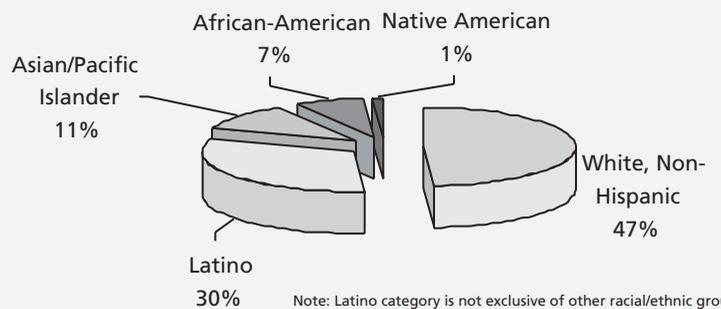
Additionally, 17% of the APA population lives below poverty, especially children. The rise in child poverty is exemplified by the fact that in 2000, 1 in 8 Asian children and 1 in 5 Pacific Islander children lived in poverty. Furthermore, refugee communities face severe poverty with 63% of Hmongs, 51% of Laotians and 47% of Cambodians living below the federal poverty level.<sup>7</sup>

Asian Pacific Americans have also borne the brunt of welfare reform. Though only 25% of APAs are CalWORKs (California’s Temporary Aid for Needy Families Program) beneficiaries they comprise about 70% of those recipients who will have their benefits cut due to time limits. It is also important to note that 90% of CalWORKs participants are Southeast Asian refugees.<sup>8</sup>

California: Major Racial & Ethnic Group, 1990



California: Major Racial & Ethnic Categories, 2000



Moreover, language and cultural barriers prevent many APAs from moving out of poverty. They are often denied access to education and job training programs due to a lack of English proficiency or because of their immigration status. Being pushed out of CalWORKS will only further entrench these communities in poverty and low-wage employment.

**Employment**

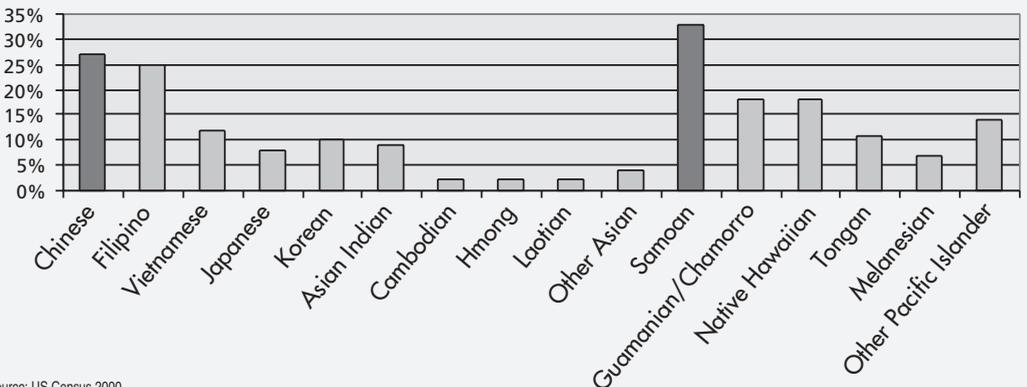
Asians comprise 10% of California’s workforce.<sup>9</sup> A significant portion of the APA community, especially recent immigrants, are employed in the low-wage service sector economy. They work in fast food, garment, security and janitorial/housekeeping jobs. They are often paid less than a living wage and receive no health insurance. Low wages and the denial of benefits contributes to the cycle of poverty for these APAs.

Many APAs are uninsured because they lack job-based health insurance. In 1998, 22.3% of APAs were uninsured and thus more likely to rely on programs such as Medi-Cal.<sup>10</sup> Of the APA uninsured in 1999, about 28% were women and 37% were immigrant women. However only 13.9% of Asians and 13.4% of Pacific Islanders were enrolled in Medi-Cal/Healthy Families in 2001.<sup>11</sup> The number of APAs enrolled in Medi-Cal may fall further as state funding for Medi-Cal is cut and eligibility rules are tightened. Furthermore, if the Bush Administration’s plan to block grant Medicaid is successful, nearly 14 million “optional” Medicaid beneficiaries nationally will lose their entitlement to health services, including a large number of APAs.

**THE NEED FOR STATE LEVEL ACTION**

The daily realities for large segments of the APA population in California are grim, not unlike the conditions for other communities of color and low-income populations. As public resources shrink, military aggression rises both domestically and globally, and demographics continue to shift in this majority people of color state, the need for large-scale systemic changes becomes increasingly critical.

California's APA Ethnic Groups, 2000



Source: US Census 2000

In 2002, APEN began to put into action our five-year strategic plan that emphasizes California as a key geographic priority. California has the 7<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world with over 35 million people residing in the state, and has proven to be a bell-wether state in national policies and political trends. California is also home to 35% of the nation's APA population. These facts, coupled with the reactionary political winds and economic stagnation, led us to determine that to counter the devastating conditions in our communities, building significant progressive capacity at the state level is necessary, and that APA communities are a key component in building a new power dynamic.

APEN believes that the long-term strategies in California must include direct constituent organizing in communities and in the workplace, and strategic alliances regionally, statewide and nationally. Because of the size of California, there is a need to build progressive capacity in key regions throughout the state. APEN's community organizing in Richmond and Oakland, coupled with our regional alliances, strengthen the San Francisco Bay Area region in this state power equation.

Community and worker organizing are becoming more vibrant in California's APA communities. The Chinese Progressive Association in San Francisco encompasses multi-layered programs that includes youth organizing, housing justice and a worker center. The Asian Immigrant Women Advocates in Oakland organizes intergenerational Asian women and has made radical gains in the working conditions of garment workers. The Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates in Los Angeles has won improvements for the restaurant and supermarket workers in Koreatown. And APEN's Laotian Organizing Project, Asian Youth Advocates and Power in Asians Organizing has brought critical environmental justice issues to a national level, and now is aiming for significant gains in the area of housing justice.

Union participation has increasingly become a means for low-wage APA workers to improve their standard of living and access health insurance. According to the California State Federation of Labor, Asians constitute only 3.4% of union membership nationally, but in California they represent 9.5% of the union members. Moreover, numerous service sector unions, including the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union and the Service Employees International Union, are strengthening their APA worker organizing efforts.

APEN firmly believes that no one organization can achieve large-scale systemic changes alone, that it will take a broad-based multiracial movement. Within this framework, APEN has been working with environmental justice, economic and social justice and labor groups throughout the state over the last two years to explore the opportunities to build an alternative, progressive force at the state level that can win significant policy changes for low-income communities and communities of color. APEN continues to participate in this new California alliance.

Although the realities for California’s APA communities present challenges, the opportunities for action are ripe. As California stands at a crossroads, APEN is clear about the path to move California in the right direction. We will continue to (1) wage campaigns to win progressive policies and build new levels of APA leadership through community organizing, (2) strengthen strategic multiracial alliances at the regional, state and national levels, and (3) push an economic and environmental justice agenda that emphasizes the public good over profit, and the right of communities to make decisions that impact their lives. In these challenging times of economic and political uncertainty, it is this vision that guides us and paves the road ahead.

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Finance.

<sup>2</sup> Yan, Andrew and Paul Ong, “California: A Community of Communities,” in The New Face of Asian Pacific America by Eric Lai and Dennis Arguelles, eds., AsianWeek 2003: Chapter 1, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Data from the 2000 US Census. This information is for the single race category. The numbers would be larger if it included multiracial responses.

<sup>4</sup> Asian Pacific American Legal Center, “Demographic Profile of Asian and Pacific Islanders in Southern California: Census 2000,” January 2003: p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Asian Pacific American Legal Center, p. 4. This percentage includes both single race and multiracial respondents.

<sup>6</sup> Yan, et al, pp.125-128.

<sup>7</sup> Chow, May, “Upcoming Welfare Cut to Hurt APA Families,” AsianWeek: Bay & California News Section, Jan.2 2003, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Chow, p. 11

<sup>9</sup> 2001 Work and Health Survey.

<sup>10</sup> “Health Trends and Indicators in California and the United States,” Chartbook from the Kaiser Family Foundation: June 2000, p.30, exhibit 3.8.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, E. Richard, et al. “The State of Health Insurance in California: Findings from 2001 California Health Interview Survey,” UCLA Center for Health Policy Research: June 2002, p. 20.

# APEN Happenings



**2002** was a significant year of growth and new experiences for the APEN family. We'd like to share a few with you...

After ten years, Jack Chin stepped down as Board Chair. We are grateful for Jack's vision, leadership and years of dedication to APEN and the EJ movement. Jack will continue to serve on the Board, now as Treasurer! We are also excited that long-time movement activist Pam Tau Lee has taken on the role of our new Board Chair. Pam played a key role at Summit 2 and her amazing leadership united the many social and environmental justice organizations in attendance. A big thank you to Jack & Pam for their tremendous commitment and service to APEN - we couldn't continue our work without you!

We also welcomed two new Board members: Helen Chen, an attorney with the Asian Law Caucus, and Pronita Gupta, research director with the Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy. Both have been long-time supporters of APEN, and we're excited and fortunate to have Helen and Pronita on board for their leadership, expertise and support.

APEN's staff also expanded over the past year to 13 staff. It's hard to believe we launched PAO and brought on our first community organizer, Amber Chan, just last March. We also hired our first Researcher, Jenny Lin and Development Assistant, Lisa De Castro.

LOP Lead Organizer, Grace Kong, announced her pregnancy and is due in August 2003, adding another young one to the APEN family. Long-time LOP Organizer, Torm Nompraseurt, will be assuming the Lead Organizer role at LOP. We are thrilled Torm, among other staff, will be stepping up in their roles with the organization over the next year!

(L-R) TOP ROW:  
Amber, Manami,  
Jenny, Ann, Joselito,  
Torm, Ikuko, Vivian  
BOTTOM ROW:  
Grace, Mari Rose,  
May, Sandy, Lisa

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**Make an on-line donation.** Visit [www.apen4ej.org](http://www.apen4ej.org) and click the DonateNow! button. All on-line donations are secure through groundspring.org.

**Host a house party.** A house party is a fun way to share APEN's work with friends and family and fundraise. You supply the guest list, house, and snacks and we bring materials and guest speakers from APEN.

**Give at the office.** If your workplace is part of the United Way or the California State Employees Campaign, you can write APEN, tax i.d. #94-3261846 in the "Donor Option" section of the card or ask your office administrator for the "Option Card."

**Match your gift.** Check to see if your company has a matching gifts program and you could double or triple your gift to APEN.

**Donate stock .** If your stock is not doing so well and you want to get rid of it, you can support APEN and get a big tax break at the same time.

**Sign up for our list-serv.** Stay in regular contact with APEN and the API community. Visit [www.apen4ej.org](http://www.apen4ej.org) to sign-up and receive information on our latest happenings and share your own news with us.

**Call us at 510.834.8920 for more information on any of these giving opportunities.**

# ASIAN PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2002

## Assets

Current Assets	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$385,724
Investments	43,517
Grants receivable	401,418
Prepaid expenses	8,663
<u>Total Current Assets</u>	<u>839,322</u>
Property and equipment, net	13,433
Total Assets	\$852,755

## LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

### Current Liabilities

Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$20,750
Obligation under capital lease-current portion	3,743
<u>Total Current Liabilities</u>	<u>24,493</u>
Obligation under capital lease	3,495
<u>Total Liabilities</u>	<u>27,988</u>

### Net Assets

Unrestricted	91,295
Temporarily restricted	733,472
<u>Total Net Assets</u>	<u>824,767</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$852,755

Audit conducted by Crosby and Kaneda, Certified Public Accountants. A complete copy of the audited financial statements is on file and available for review at the Asian Pacific Environmental Network.

*Thanks to our outstanding volunteers!*

Debbie Berliner	Art Huggard	Liz Suk
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Asian Pacific  
Environmental Network

310 8th street, suite 309  
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return service requested

## **Mission Statement**

All people have a right to a clean and healthy environment, in which their communities can live, work, learn, play and thrive. Towards this vision, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network was founded in 1993 to bring together a collective voice among the diverse Asian Pacific Islander communities in the United States to work for environmental, social and economic justice. Through building an organized movement, we strive to bring fundamental changes to institutions that will prioritize the right of every person to a decent, safe, affordable quality of life, and to participate in collectively-made decisions affecting our lives.