

APEN

Asian Pacific Environmental Network
Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2004

Voices



FROM THE BELLY OF THE BEAST A CHALLENGE FROM THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM TO ORGANIZE FROM WITHIN



"If you come here to help me you're wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, let us begin."

—Lilla Watson, New Zealand Aboriginal Activist

In January 2004, 150,000 global justice activists and organizers from around the world converged on Mumbai, India at the World Social Forum (WSF) to discuss, debate and strategize towards the possibility of another world – one based on the core values of peace, justice and liberation from the

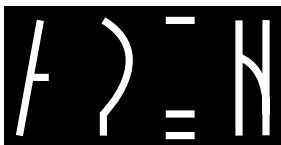
oppression of racism, patriarchy and religious persecution. The WSF was born as a response to the annual corporate-based World Economic Forum and serves as a critical "open space" for organizations, networks, activists and organizers to discuss, strategize and promote alternatives to neo-liberal economic policies and

globalization. APEN's Organizing Team took part in this historic event, joining Grassroots Global Justice, a coalition of grassroots organizations working to build and strengthen a grassroots social and economic justice movement in the U.S. that is capable of acting in true solidarity with international counterparts in the struggle for justice.

As those who reside in the U.S. and organize from the "belly of the beast" – a nation whose military forces have waged terror on communities in every continent, whose corporations profit from the privatization and commodification of other countries' natural resources – the questions for us became: What is our role as U.S.-based activists and organizations fighting for environmental and economic justice? What does it mean to be a good ally?

Understanding the linkages between our own local struggles and the struggles of communities abroad. Any international movement for global environmental justice has to come together around a common analysis of the forces impacting all of our communities to build a strategy that brings all our power to bear. This year, APEN will engage our members in a series of political education sessions that will result in a deeper analysis of our work in a global context.

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Mission

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 (APEN) was founded to bring together a collective voice among the diverse API 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 the right to participate in collectively-made decisions affecting our lives.

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CAL EPA EJ VICTORY LEADS TO WORK WITH NEW ADMINISTRATION



APEN and LOP march for environmental justice at CalEPA action in downtown Oakland.

In a landmark victory for environmental justice (EJ), the EJ Advisory Committee of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA) met in Oakland this past fall to approve their recommendations for the state's environmental policies that incorporate key EJ provisions. 11 of APEN's Laotian leaders joined over 250 community residents and activists and testified before the Committee. Representing nearly every major geographic region in the state, people shared experiences from living next door to refineries to working in hazardous factories.

Key EJ policy wins include the adoption of: 1) The **precautionary principle**- regulations should prevent harm when there is credible evidence that harm is occurring or is likely to occur even when complete scientific evidence or proof is not available; 2) **Cumulative impact** analysis- ALL sources of pollution should be taken into consideration when determining the impact of pollution on individuals, communities and the environment; and 3) **Pollution prevention** that

encourages the utilization of new technologies, non and less-toxic products to avoid clean-up and regulatory costs. The adoption of these principles helps secure the health of our communities and will serve as the basis for implementation and enforcement of environmental and public health laws, regulations and decision-making processes.

As part of the California Alliance EJ Working Group (EJWG), APEN met with Terry Tamminen, the newly appointed Cal EPA agency secretary, to discuss the implementation and enforcement of these policy priorities as they relate to Gov. Schwarzenegger's environmental agenda. With Tamminen's commitment to ongoing meetings and local toxic tours with EJWG, and the publication of EJWG's groundbreaking report, *Building Healthy Communities from the Ground Up: Environmental Justice in California*, APEN looks forward to working with the new administration to fight for and protect environmental justice in our communities throughout the state.

WSF

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Take responsibility as those who live in the “belly of the beast.” In the present moment of global politics, the particular and distinct burden and responsibility of social and economic justice organizers and activists has never been so clear. It is our government whose policies are waging terror on communities across the world; it is our consumption practices that enable corporations to extract natural resources, employ cheap labor, and “export” our waste to other countries. At the same time that we are fighting to advance civil rights, win environmental justice, and protect social services, we must also fight to make our government accountable in the international realm, or kick them

out of office. We need to fight for our right to have environmental and economically-sound alternatives.

Sharpen our plan & efforts to build a progressive, more powerful and effective grassroots movement. The upcoming 2004 November elections, the ongoing war against Iraq and other countries abroad, the assault and attacks on justice, civil rights, and freedom being waged at home are all reminders of the work we have before us. With new leadership, renewed energy and inspiration, APEN will forge ahead to expand our grassroots power, strengthen our organizing capacity in API communities across the nation, and join forces with other communities of color and low-income communities to win environmental justice, here and abroad.



APEN Youth Organizer, Sandy Saeteurn, joins fellow activists at World Social Forum

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING

Youth are a vital part of every family, neighborhood and society, and are the heart of our communities. A few continents away, at the World Social Forum (WSF), our organizers observed that youth organizing was not separate from adult organizing in communities internationally. Despite having a separate Youth Camp at the WSF, there were more youth attending the general activities than the youth-specific ones. We were reminded that the “youth movement” is not its own thing, but an integrated part of the larger community.

For the Laotian community in Richmond, the Asian Youth Advocates (AYA) has always played an important role in the Laotian Organizing Project. At every event, activity or meeting, our youth are present and involved. After eight years of experience with AYA, we are now committed to challenging ourselves to think differently about youth and the role they play in our community organizing efforts. This year at APEN, we’re working

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API VOTES IN OAKLAND HELP DEFEAT PROP 54

Oakland has the second largest Chinese community in the Bay Area, but few organizations alone have the capacity to mobilize an effective bilingual team on election

issues. For the October 2003 elections, Power in Asians Organizing (PAO) teamed up with Asian Pacific Americans for an Informed California and SEIU 616, and mobilized Chinese voters in Oakland to help successfully defeat Proposition 54, an initiative which would have prohibited the state from collecting and using demographic information to identify racial and ethnic



Vivian Chang, APEN Organizing Director, speaks out at Prop 54 press conference in Oakland

disparities in public education, health, environmental protection and employment. Early on, PAO realized the need to work together with other organizations to train, educate,

and turnout immigrant and monolingual voters because of the direct impact it would have on our communities.

The previous year, PAO began to build electoral power in November 2002, with the creation of a new monolingual team built within our membership to help pass Oakland’s *Just Cause*,

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Prop 54

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Measure EE, which protects renters against unfair evictions in Oakland. Our phonebanking efforts taught us that not only did we need translated materials and voter trainings run in Mandarin and Cantonese, but we also needed to translate the thousands of romanized voter surnames into Chinese characters to call and greet voters by the correct name. By being able to pronounce the names correctly, communication was opened and trust could be developed between phonebankers and voters. In response to this need, PAO created one of the most comprehensive voter databases and call lists tailored to monolingual Chinese phonebankers and voters. One year later, using some of the same database and translation systems, we tripled our out-

reach numbers, and successfully defeated Prop 54.

For Cang Ye, an 81 year-old PAO leader active since April 2002, defeating Prop 54 was one of his most memorable moments in 2003. He commented, "I have lived in Oakland for about 10 years. It is the first time Oakland voters got involved so much in the election campaign. You saw NO on 54 posters everywhere in Chinatown. You heard people talk about it in TV, radio, even in the restaurant. I was so happy and proud of Oakland Chinese voters, because during phone banking, people responded with positive commitment like 'yeah, you bet, I will vote.'" Marie Ma, a soft-spoken leader said, "It was my first phone bank for an election. I learned a lot and had a very good phone bank experience, for my communication skills and confidence improved. I am afraid to talk to strangers or those who might disagree with me.

This time I did not back off like I used to, instead I explained why we needed to defeat Prop 54. Normally people would listen and support us."

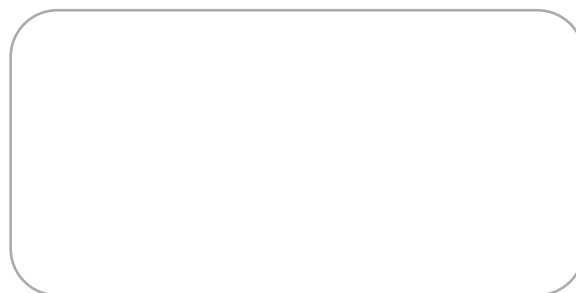
Oakland voted 75.6% against Prop 54, much higher than the 65% statewide, and showed that Oakland is strong and APIs can make a difference! PAO is ready to take on and build even stronger coalitions for the upcoming 2004 elections.

New Directions

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to move AYA in a direction that can better serve our youth's needs and increase their participation as part of our community leadership. Our goal for APEN's organizing is to reflect the community - multi-ethnic and intergenerational, including elders, adults, children and youth.

fold



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Thank you for supporting our 2003 Year End Fundraising Campaign!

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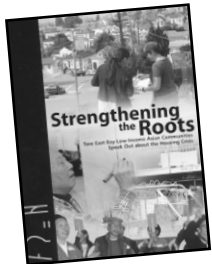
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Strengthening the Roots: Two East Bay Low Income Communities Speak Out about the Housing Crisis In the San Francisco Bay Area housing affordability remains at crisis levels for low income Asians.

Resident in Richmond and Oakland speak out about the conditions they face, and the need for housing stability to strengthen and preserve cultural and ethnic communities.

Building Healthy Communities from the Ground Up: Environmental Justice in California, outlines key EJ concerns and recommendations for building grassroots power and influence at the state level.



The report is a collaboration of the California Alliance EJ Working Group, and was prepared by APEN Board Member, Martha Matsuoka.

Reports are \$6 (includes shipping and handling). Make checks payable to APEN. Call APEN at (510) 834-8920 for any questions.



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