



National Asian American Community Leaders to Speak Out in Support of Black Community and Call for Healing

Date: June 5, 2020

What: Press conference with members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) and national Asian American leaders to call for justice for the Black community, and a peaceful protest during this time of national unrest.

Who: Hosted by the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), the following speakers will be recognized (other speakers TBD):

- CAPAC Chair, Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA)
- Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)
- Bao Vang, Executive Director, Hmong National Development
- Bo Thao-Urabe, Executive Director, Coalition of Asian American Leaders
- Lakshmi Sridaran, Executive Director, South Asian Americans Leading Together
- Tavae Samuelu, Executive Director, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities

The following is a transcript of Bao Vang’s speech to CAPAC’s Representative Judy Chu (D-CA) and Senator Duckworth (D-IL) in support of a CAPAC Solidarity.

Good Afternoon Madam Chair, Senator Duckworth and my colleagues of the AAPI community.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and share with you our stories of the injustices we witnessed in Minnesota, and why we need to come together, with a unified voice, to demand for justice and real change.

My name is Bao Vang, and I am the President & CEO of Hmong National Development, a subsidiary of Hmong American Partnership (HAP), which is a local-based social service organization in St. Paul, Minnesota. HND’s mission is to empower the Hmong community to achieve prosperity and equality through education, research, policy advocacy and leadership development. We exist to create a united, thriving Hmong community.

As an organization, we stand with our Black community in demanding justice and holding accountable those who killed George Floyd. We are heartbroken that our justice system continues to fail Black and Brown communities, and we recognize that anti-blackness within our own communities contributed to George Floyd's death. As a Hmong organization, we have been vocal about the deep systemic inequities that privileges one race over others. George Floyd's death reminds us of the centuries old racism that exists to separate and divide a collective voice for justice.

Our history and experiences are different from our Black brothers and sisters, but we share one common enemy – oppression. Centuries ago, it was oppression that led us to leave China and disperse throughout Southeast Asia. It was oppression that made us flee a war-torn country during the Vietnam War. It is oppression that divided us and created our diasporic experience. It is oppression that divides us as a community, and it is Hmong National Development's role to unite our Hmong people in solidarity with their communities, no matter their country or origin.

In the past week, the country was witness to the violence that destroyed so many Twin Cities' neighborhoods and businesses, and as Minnesotans, we watched our beloved cities burn to the ground. So many of the 25,000 community members we serve, live and work in the communities that were hit the hardest: South and North Minneapolis, the East Side of Saint Paul and our Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. We watched the businesses that we helped to get back on their feet during Covid-19 Pandemic, only to see them looted, destroyed, and burnt to the ground. We listened to and cried along with our Hmong business owners as they shared their journey of their American Dream, and to only have all their life savings gone in an instant. We saw the terror in our refugee community members who spoke about reliving their trauma, when many of them had to evacuate their homes in a moment's notice. For those who chose to stay in their homes, we heard about their need to protect their families and their properties, and many who did not have a gun went to purchase one. We were told, "how many more wars do we need to go through to find our peace?"

There are many more stories to share and many more people who are impacted from this system of oppression. As an organization, we exist to fight this system that does not value lives – especially Black lives. We know that the destruction of buildings and properties are a symptom of a deeper systemic issue. Every day, my staff wake up, roll up their sleeves, and collectively fight against this system. We are on the ground working along with community to build a vibrant Minnesota, and we need policies that will rebuild our community- for and by our community.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg Address, "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure." Centuries later, we are still fighting that great Civil War. We are

battling a war with racism and oppression, and it has surfaced the racism pandemic we bear witness to in the deaths of George Floyd, Freddie Gray, Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, and so many others who have died at the hands of police. We say their names because they matter. We say their names, so that we do not forget the enormous task ahead in our fight for their justice.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.” As an organization, that is why we stand united right now, because our country’s task is long overdue, and our nation’s policies are obsolete. We are elevating our voices so that new policies and systems will lead us towards the transformative change we all are seeking.