



BRIAN MINAMI/Rafa Shompa

Attorney Robin Toma addresses press conference, while Japanese Peruvians Alicia Nishimoto and Carmen Mochizuki look on.

REDRESS

Hundreds Still Denied as Program Nears End

Civil rights groups call on the Justice Department to grant reparations to those who have been turned down by ORA.

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA

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Emphasizing a sense of urgency at a press conference held Monday, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, Campaign for Justice for Japanese Latin Americans, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRP) called on the Justice Department to grant redress to those who suffered injustice at the hands of the U.S. government during the war, but have been denied redress by ORA.

As the Department of Justice's Office of Redress Administration (ORA) prepares to close down on Aug. 10, 1998, hundreds of persons of Japanese ancestry who were deprived of their freedom and property by the U.S. government during World War II continue to be denied an official U.S. government apology and \$20,000 compensation as provided by the landmark Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

John Saito, Sr., representing the JACL, pointed out that "within one year the sun will set" on the Civil Liberties Act, which was signed into law on Aug. 10, 1988 by President Ronald Reagan to provide an official apology and monetary compensation to every person of Japanese ancestry who lost his or her freedom during World War II as a result of U.S. government action.

Saito's family of East Los Angeles was among 120,000 Nikkei interned during World War II based on their Japanese ancestry. His parents, who were incarcerated at Poston, Ariz., both died before the passage of Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and did not receive an apology or compensation from the U.S. government, but Saito and his brother received their redress payments of \$20,000 each.

"More than 80,000 people have received reparations," Saito said, "but there still remain several hundreds of people who we believe were unjustly treated by our government and whose grievances need to be redressed."

Among those denied compensation are people of Japanese ancestry who lived in Peru and other Latin American countries during the war. According to a 1983 congressional report, 2,264 Nikkei Latin Americans were abducted without due process of law from 13 Latin American nations and placed in U.S. concentration camps. The purpose of this mass abduction of civilians was to have persons of Japanese ancestry to exchange for American prisoners-of-war. Up to 1,800 of these former abductees are estimated to be alive today.

Alicia Nishimoto of Gardena, a Japanese Peruvian and one of the named plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the government, said, "How can I forget, even after 54 years, what the U.S. government did to us. It was a terrible experience. We were prisoners with no passports, we were classified as illegal aliens. That was bad enough. We couldn't go back to Peru. We learned we were persons without a country."

Nishimoto, who in 1943, was abducted along with thousands of other Japanese Peruvians by the Peruvian government—under the direction of the U.S. government—and taken to the U.S. and placed in a camp at Crystal City, Tex., said, "It's very important to me to get redress. We shared the same camps as the Japanese Americans and they were given compensation, but we did not because we were from Peru. We ask the government to give us an apology and redress."

Robin Toma, attorney for the plaintiffs, said, "For the U.S. government to bring people here against their will and to say they were

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—Lucille Kawate Honda, whose father was fired by Union Pacific railroad at the start of World War II

here illegally ... after they brought the Peruvians here for prisoner exchanges, to deny them redress is an outrage."

Toma pointed out that President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno approved the payment of reparations to a German Holocaust victim who was an American citizen, with the president stating that we shouldn't allow technicalities to interfere with justice.

"How is the (Japanese Peruvians') situation any different? Alicia and (Japanese Peruvian) Carmen (Mochizuki) were taken from their homes, placed on ships and brought to a foreign land. One family had to go to Japan, a land recently atomic bombed," he said.

"We believe the injustice here is very great. We hope the United States government, instead of fighting it, will settle the case," stated Toma, who earlier this year joined a group of concerned people who traveled to Washington, D.C., to deliver 4,000 letters to the president urging him to take action now to settle the case.

Elizabeth Schrader of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the only group to speak out against the forced evacuation of

Nikkei during World War II, noted that 55 years after the internment people are still struggling for redress.

Referring to the lawsuit filed by the Japanese Latin Americans against the government to be included in the Civil Liberties Act, Schrader said, "What is shocking is that this case had to be brought at all. And what is more shocking is the government has not budged from its position to offer redress to people our own government helped kidnap from a foreign country ... What we must do is fight for the reparations they are entitled to."

Others denied redress include former Japanese American railroad and mining workers who were prohibited by U.S. government order from railroad facilities and copper mines in designated military zones. Their freedom to travel was restricted, and their ability to continue their employment became extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Lucille Kawate Honda, whose father, Masaichi Kawate, was fired by Union Pacific railroad after Pearl Harbor, noted that her father had "given 38 years of dedicated service" from 1904-1942 and had worked his way up to section foreman. "He believed America was the land of freedom and opportunity ... and he ended up jobless for looking like the enemy."

Honda recalled, "Those were traumatic times. We had lived in company housing, seven miles from Ogden, Utah. We were given one day to vacate the premises. We were faced with having no food, no shelter, under stringent curfew and other restrictions. My father's bank account was frozen by the government. FBI agents came in and confiscated his camera, binoculars and radio. He was stripped of his sole source of income."

The Kawate family, who lived in the barn of a family friend for one year sharecropping tomatoes, later moved to Salt Lake City, where the parents found menial jobs. Despite everything, her parents continued their loyalty to the U.S. and when the McCarran Act was passed in 1952, eliminating naturalization restrictions based on race, they became U.S. citizens.

"Japanese railroad workers who were abruptly fired ... are still waiting ... The U.S. government must make amends by giving reparations and an apology to the families of Japanese American railroad workers," said Honda.

Wendy Hirota, representing a category of people who were born outside of camp after Jan. 20, 1945, and had their freedoms restricted, protested the ORA's decision to make the cutoff date of birth for redress payments at Jan. 20, 1945, instead of June 30, 1946, as originally stated in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 stated that

Redress

From Page 1

the government should review "with liberality" these redress cases, but, Hirota noted, "the ORA is taking the narrow view on the cutoff date..."

Hirota, who was born in Denver, Colo., in February 1946, after her parents left Tule Lake concentration camp, urged the government to abide by the dates of the relocation period as stated in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

"In this final year of the redress program, we urge our government to close this chapter in U.S. history with an uplifting message," said Richard Katsuda, president of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations. "That message should be that our government accorded a full measure of justice to all those who were deprived of liberty by the

U.S. government during World War II."

Albert Muratsuchi, Pacific Southwest regional director of JACL, added, "The struggle for redress is not over. While over 80,000 people have received redress, we should not turn our backs on the hundreds who suffered tremendously during the war but have been denied justice."

Current efforts to secure redress for the Japanese Latin Americans, railroad and mining workers and others include legislative and administrative advocacy as well as litigation.

Katsuda, Toma and other supporters of redress encouraged concerned community members to telephone and write letters to the president and their legislators urging them to bring about a fair settlement to the cases.

For more information, call (213) 626-4471.
