

CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE

Redress Now for Japanese Latin Americans!

February 2004

Shibayama Petition Filed with Organization of American States

In June 2003, Art, Kenichi and Takeshi Shibayama filed a petition in an international forum seeking acknowledgment and equitable redress from the U.S. government for “war crimes and crimes against humanity” perpetuated against them as children during WWII. Sixty years ago, the three brothers, all born in Peru, were taken as part of a U.S. government-orchestrated abduction of over 2,200 persons of Japanese ancestry who were citizens and residents of 13 Latin American countries. It brought men, women and children at gunpoint on U.S. military transports, confiscated their passports, and incarcerated them in U.S. camps for up to six years. The Shibayama brothers, along with co-petitioner, the Japanese Peruvian Oral History Project (JPOHP), were represented before the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by attorney Karen Parker, lead counsel for the petitioners.

Ms. Parker explained that the Organization of American States’ (OAS) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is like the regional United Nations for the Americas. The Shibayamas and JPOHP filed their petition with the OAS after they were unable to obtain justice in U.S. domestic courts. Ms. Parker said that because the U.S. has not ratified many international treaties, it is not accountable to any courts but its own domestic courts. She stressed that it is critical for voters to hold their elected officials accountable for the full implementation and application of international and human rights law standards to the petitions of U.S. claimants in international courts.

“Most people know the internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry for the sordid history that it is,” said Ms. Parker. “But in terms of . . . the applicable law at the time, it is considered a crime against humanity to do to Art what was done to him,” she said. Ms. Parker emphasized that the U.S. has “never acknowledged or apologized that they did it. Until there is a full acknowledgment and apology, the crime is ongoing. We are also . . . in a situation where the wartime Supreme Court decision which said that it was permissible to [intern Japanese Americans] has not been reversed.” ♦

The Education Fund: A Legacy for All

The Campaign for Justice (CFJ) is proposing legislation (see below) that asks for the re-establishment of the Public Education Fund originally created by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (CLA). Fifty million dollars was to be earmarked for education under the CLA, but only \$5 million was appropriated in the last year of the redress program. Thus, CFJ is seeking to fulfill the educational mandate of the CLA with the appropriation of the remaining \$45 million. The potential for this fund is enormous. So much was accomplished with the \$5 million from the CLA. These funds have spawned invaluable projects, curricula, events, artistic and cultural expressions as well as permanent physical installations. It is clear that the education funds are a critical part of our legacy.

The Public Education Fund is also a bridge from the past to the present, and a legacy for future generations. It is a way for us to create a legacy in honor of those internees who predeceased the passage of the CLA. It provides an opportunity to enhance the public’s understanding of these historical events and to encourage exploration of relevant current national and international issues. The public education fund will be an opportunity for anyone of any race, ethnicity or creed to propose an idea, to make a connection, or to bring insight to a personal or community experience that will shed light on not only the incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry, but on the ways in which our civil and human rights remain vulnerable to attack today. ♦

The Wartime Parity & Justice Act of 2003 (H.R. 779)

- ▶ authorizes \$45 million in public education funding to fulfill the educational mandate of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (CLA);
- ▶ provides redress to Japanese Latin Americans who suffered civil and human rights violations by the U.S. government during World War II;
- ▶ provides redress to Japanese Americans who have been unjustly denied for technical reasons or narrow interpretations of the CLA.