

NAPAWF

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

PLATFORM PAPERS

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This collection of Platform Papers describe the six issue areas that form the basis for NAPAWF's work. The Platform Papers are not meant to provide a complete list of issues and concerns in these areas. Nor does the format of this collection assume that the issues discussed can be neatly separated into six areas. Rather, the Platform Papers are intended to be works-in-progress that serve as companions to the organization's grassroots work.

PLATFORM PAPER ON

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

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ISSUE AREAS

- Discrimination in employment opportunities and conditions
- Deterrents to economic independence
- Support and "safety nets" for the economically poor
- Economic exploitation of immigrant API women and girls in sweatshop industries
- Sexual exploitation of API women and girls

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

API women and girls encounter a diversity of experiences in the American labor force and workplace. These experiences are largely conditioned by pervasive racism and oppressive patriarchal cultural norms in both API and mainstream communities. Although U.S.-born and English-proficient API women and girls generally hold "white- or pink-collar" jobs, they face ongoing racial and gender discrimination in the workplace: pay inequities, employment typecasting, and limited career mobility. Immigrant and non-English speaking API women and girls are often concentrated in industries characterized by excessively long working hours, labor intensive work, and subsistence wages: garment "sweatshops," restaurants, and domestic service. Economic class, citizenship status and limited English language skills make these workers especially vulnerable to exploitation as exemplified by the global trafficking of primarily API women and girls.

This complex interplay of racism, sexism, and economic exploitation impedes economic independence for API women and girls, which involves the power to

control and define the conditions of their work and their lives. In the long run, the wage inequities experienced by API women at their peak working ages directly contributes to subsequent inequities in their pension benefits, thereby condemning many API women to poverty in their old age. Inadequate protections and lax enforcement of U.S. labor laws as well as legislative policies that weaken the social and economic "safety net" for politically and economically marginalized members of society reinforce the continued subjugation of API women.

PLATFORM GOALS

- To eliminate discrimination against and exploitation of API women and girls in the workplace.
- To achieve economic independence and create economic opportunities for API women.
- To secure stable "safety net" support resources for economically poor API women and girls.
- To combat the international trafficking and exploitation of API women.
- To eliminate sweatshop conditions in industries where immigrant API women are employed.

ISSUE AREA OBJECTIVES

- Secure all API working women's rights to fair liveable wages and benefits, to safe and decent working conditions, and to collectively organize and represent their labor.
- Increase educational and job training opportunities that are sensitive to the social, cultural, and economic realities of API women.
- Advocate for culturally sensitive, affordable child care to enable API women to manage work and family responsibilities.
- Increase API women's economic and social power to control and define the conditions of their work and their lives by combating patriarchal cultural norms in both the API and mainstream communities.
- Increase accessibility to and capacity of safety nets to support economically poor API women and their families in culturally appropriate ways by developing alternative resources and improving community accountability. Safeguard the safety net for older API women in retirement.
- Raise national and international public awareness about the global trafficking of API women and girls by creating linkages and building coalitions with other activists. Develop and implement a strategy that leverages our unique position as API women in the United States to effect national policies addressing this issue.

ISSUE AREA STRATEGIES

- Compile data about API women's labor to inform the development of policies and advocacy strategies that address API women's labor and economic issues and to establish accountability benchmarks for employers, labor organizations, and governments.
- Provide and support a variety of educational, advocacy, organizing, and outreach activities, programs and materials (e. g., position papers, public workshops and events, speakers bureaus, mentoring programs, labor organizing and media campaigns, etc.) that increase knowledge and understanding about the myriad issues affecting API women and girls and that uphold API women's rights to control and define their labor and their

lives. Issues to include: employment discrimination; sexual harassment; self-advocacy and empowerment; trafficking of women and girls; access to education and job-training, including non-traditional occupations; etc.

- Collaborate with other community-based organizations and activists to improve awareness of, access to and advocacy for particular "safety net" support services needed by economically poor API women and their families (culturally competent outreach, language accessibility, etc.). Create community accountability for augmenting publicly supported "safety net" programs with resources available within the API community (e.g. collaborating with API bar associations to provide pro bono services to economically poor API women and their families).
- Develop effective internal organizational structures that enable NAPAWF to implement a variety of strategies (e. g. national media strategy, national legislative strategy, etc.) and to proactively respond to issues affecting API women and girls.
- Engage in and create an information/resource bank about national and international organizing efforts to combat the exploitation of API women and girls and their labor (e. g. global trafficking, sweatshops, etc.)

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

None listed.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN PROPOSAL

Young Chinese women are working as indentured servants of a garment manufacturing business operating in the Mariana Islands, a U. S. territory exempt from U. S. labor and immigration laws. The business, which is owned by a local government of mainland China, contracts these "guest workers" for a period of two years but can unilaterally extend the contract which prohibits the workers from striking, asking for higher wages, dating or marrying, engaging in local politics or in religious activities, or returning to their homes. These women work 18-hour days (8 a. m. to 2 a. m.) six days a week and live 8 to a room. In addition, some women work for 6 months before receiving their pay and, at the end of two years, may take home only \$300.00.

This exploitation of Asian women has domestic and international dimensions since the business is sited on U. S. territory, involves foreign nationals working for a business owned by their home government, and potentially affects API immigrants in the United States who may lose job opportunities if businesses operating in the U. S. relocate their manufacturing facilities offshore.

NAPAWF could co-sponsor a national educational and advocacy campaign with Sweatshop Watch, a sister organization currently investigating the situation, as well as Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA). While the details of such a campaign can be developed at a later date, NAPAWF should target API women and consumers as a particular audience for future mobilization and action (e. g., boycotts).