



JAPANESE AMERICAN  
NATIONAL MUSEUM



## **STATEMENT OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS CONDEMNING REMARKS BY ROANOKE MAYOR AND POLITICAL DEMAGOGUERY SURROUNDING PLIGHT OF SYRIAN AND IRAQI REFUGEES**

The under-signed Asian-American associations and institutions condemn Roanoke Mayor David Bowers' efforts to justify his request to city agencies to deny aid to Syrian refugees by citing President Roosevelt's decision to incarcerate 120,000 Japanese-Americans during World War II, and the recent political demagoguery surrounding the treatment of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Far from justifying the exclusion of refugees from the Middle East, the WWII incarceration of Japanese-Americans underscores the risks to our democracy when politicians and government officials bend to racism, political opportunism, and war-time hysteria by targeting an entire people for exclusionary policies based on race or religion.

In his letter to city agencies, Mayor Bowers stated:

"[S]ince the recent terrorist bombing of the Russian airliner, the attacks in Paris and now with the numerous threats to our nation's capital, I am convinced it is presently imprudent to assist in the relocation of Syrian refugees to our part of Virginia. . . I'm reminded that President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt compelled to sequester Japanese foreign nationals after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and it appears that the threat of harm to America from ISIS is just as real and serious as that from our enemies then."

Such a statement reflects an unfortunate ignorance of American history. The incarceration of 120,000 Japanese-Americans, the majority of them American citizens, represents one of the most shameful episodes in the history of our Nation and the U.S. Supreme Court. De-classified government documents have shown that Japanese-Americans were overwhelmingly loyal to the United States, and that the incarceration was driven, not by legitimate security concerns, but by racism, incompetence, and cynical political considerations. Tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans went on to fight with distinction for the U.S. military in World War II; the all-Nisei 442d Regimental Combat team remains one of the most decorated units in the history of the U.S. military. Forty years later, Congress passed and President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which recognized that the WWII incarceration represented "a grave injustice," and that "these actions were carried out without adequate security reasons and without any acts of espionage or sabotage, and were motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." On the fiftieth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, President George H.W. Bush said: "No nation can fully understand itself or find its place in the world if it does not look with

clear eyes at all the glories and disgraces, too, of the past. . . The internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry was a great injustice, and it will never be repeated.”

We are even more deeply troubled by the crude efforts of Mayor Bowers and other politicians to demagogue the tragic plight of Syrian and Iraqi refugees for political advantage. America has always been a nation that welcomes those fleeing political and religious persecution. The refugees that Mayor Bowers seeks to exclude include Yazidis, Muslims, and Christians who are being killed or enslaved because they do not share ISIS’ ideology or violent extremism. It is unfortunate that Mayor Bowers and other politicians would seek to exploit this tragic situation for political advantage and to support their ambitions for higher office. As we gather for a Thanksgiving holiday which originally celebrated the pilgrims’ safe arrival in America, we should not turn our backs on other men, women, and children who are fleeing persecution, terror, and mindless violence; such a step would be a repudiation of everything that America has stood for in the world.

Japanese-American Citizens League (JACL)  
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National Asian Pacific American Bar Association  
Asian American Psychological Association  
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Asian Law Alliance  
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance  
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
The Center for Asian Pacific American Women  
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Filipino Advocates for Justice  
Laotian American National Alliance (LANA)

Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc. (LEAP)  
Mile High JACL  
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association  
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National Korean American Service & Education Consortium  
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance  
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates OneAmerica  
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