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Statement of Mee Moua, president and executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC on anti-Muslim hate

In the 1960s and 70s, my uncles were recruited to be special guerrilla fighters in the US government's secret war against the communist regime in Laos. In 1975, my family was forced to flee to a refugee camp in Thailand and ultimately were resettled as refugees in the United States in 1978—I was 9 years old. Coming to America as Southeast Asian political refugees and being resettled across this country in small town America, in the immediate aftermath of America's entanglement with the unpopular and controversial Vietnam War was not easy.

Growing up in the Midwest, we were the only Asian Americans and often the only people of color. We were often called “chinks” and “gooks.” Walking to school, we often had trash and cigarette ash thrown at us by the passing cars. Too often to count, I've had to hose down racial slurs that were written on our drive way and garage door—sometimes with mud but many times with urine and feces. We were targets because our neighbors saw us as America's enemies from Vietnam.

The last several weeks, I have been having traumatic flashbacks to these experiences. As I child, I resigned myself to living these experiences in silence and fear because there was no one around to give me the strength to stand up for myself. Well, today, in the presence of our collective community and in our collective voices—I stand here to say to my brothers and sisters in the Arab and Muslim community that we are

here, we stand with you so you need not feel alone, isolated or defenseless.

We condemn all anti-Muslim hate and bigotry. There is NO excuse for the violence and prejudice we have seen, especially the hate crimes we have seen perpetrated against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims in recent weeks. You need not be afraid to practice your faith and go about their daily lives.

As we call upon the public and our elected leaders to reject anti-Muslim hate and bigotry, we have to remember the role each and every one of us can play. Asian Americans are a growing political force, expected to be 10 percent of the nation's electorate by 2044. But to achieve our full potential political power – to be able to really choose our elected leaders and shape the future direction of our country – we have to naturalize, register to vote, and turn out to vote. We must exercise our power at the polls. Otherwise, immigrants will continue to be seen as easy targets, and crimes will continue to be perpetrated against our communities.

We have experienced what happens when Americans do not stand up to leaders who refuse to govern in accordance with our nation's core values of fairness and equality. Injustices arise, among them the Chinese Exclusion Act and the mass incarceration of over 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry into internment camps during World War II. This cannot happen ever again.

Right now, we have a choice – to continue to be invisible, or to speak out.

We have the ability to say we want leaders who productively advance the dialogue around race. We have the ability to say we want leaders who keep America's doors open for those seeking safety, opportunity and freedom. We have the ability to say we want leaders who are going to move our country forward by celebrating America's rich diversity, not

hold us back by using racial differences as a weapon to fuel bigotry and divide our country.

Now, as we come together to oppose violence and anti-Muslim hate and bigotry, I call on each and every one of you to make your voice heard so we can shut down this ugly rhetoric and ensure we all a protected and respected part of America.

Thank you.