

Seminar on Hate Crimes Presented in Orange County

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ANAHEIM – A forum on “Hate Crimes and Japan-Bashing” presented last Saturday, June 27, to make the Japanese and Nikkei communities aware of the dangers of becoming victims of rising hate crime and increasing Japan-bashing.

Five Orange County Japanese American organizations—O.C. Japanese American Lawyers Association, O.C. Japanese American Citizens League, O.C. Japan Business Association, and SELANOCO-JACL—were co-sponsors of the event, held at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Anaheim.

Panelist Mike Yamaki, an attorney and member of the Los Angeles Police Commission, gave an overview of the March 1992 Human Relations report on hate crimes. He disclosed that 672 hate crimes were reported in 1991, a 22 percent increase over the record year, 1990, with 54 victims being Asians.

Although Japanese were the main targets, Yamaki reported, other Asians became victims because perpetrators could not tell the difference between various Asian ethnic groups.

The reason for the marked increase in hate crimes could not be pinpointed, whether there was an increase in victims or an increase in reporting, the Los Angeles attorney

continued.

He noted that Blacks, Latinos and Asians (Koreans making up 35 percent), in that order, were the main victims. Some conclusions about the rise in hate crimes were based on the rapid growth of population in the area and the cutback in education, and youth services.

Panelists participating in the seminar were John Robertson, Garden Grove Chief of Police; Dr. Frances Williams, O.C. Office of Human Relations; James Tanizaki, Senior Deputy District Attorney, Santa Ana; Kathy Imahara, Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, and moderator Lisa Kitsuta, a Newport Beach lawyer.

Chief Robertson indicated that hate crimes especially impacted the victim emotionally, more than any other crimes, and “can damage the fabric of the community. Hate crimes should be reported, and if not, could fester into a full-blown disaster.”

Law enforcement cannot respond unless they are aware of the problem, Robertson emphasized, and police should respond in a responsible way.

The chief added that community groups should educate their people on how to deal with hate crimes.

Dr. Williams remarked that the goal of the human relations office was threefold—“to educate, to give emotional support, and to provide appropriate referral organizations.”

Tanizaki outlined procedures that hate crime victims can follow—the first step is to report it to their local police department, where it will be reviewed if it is a crime, then the office of the District Attorney will review the report to see if it is a viable case.

Although many hate crimes go uncharged, the policy of the OC District Attorney's Office is to “vigorously prosecute hate crimes.”

Imahara told the attendees that they “should learn to be proactive rather than reactive” to hate crimes.

The Legal Center, she reminded them, has a dispute resolution center and also has a program of leadership development.

Imahara, a lawyer, told the audience to be aware that there are hate crime laws on the books in California and the community has to “be vigilant that these laws are not dropped by the Legislature,” and there is a need to urge legislators to support pending bills “to stem the tide of hate crimes” in California—S.B. 98 and A.B. 1009.

The panelists noted that citizens of Los Angeles and Orange counties live in an “impatient society” that want instant winners and quick fixes. “In the past, if you didn't like your neighbor, you moved, instead of developing the skills to learn to live with each other. Today, there is a need (to develop the skills to learn to live with each other) to cure the problems of hate crimes,” they said.