

STATEMENT  
TO SUPPORT  
HEALTH CARE AND MEDICAL RESEARCH  
FOR RESIDENTS OF LOWER EASTSIDE AND CHINATOWN

SUBMITTED

TO

WORLD TRADE CENTER  
EXPERT TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL

ON

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BY

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Introduction

My name is Stanley Mark and I am the program director at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), a civil rights organization. I am here today to comment on the health impact of 9/11 upon the residents of Chinatown and the Lower Eastside and on the EPA's failure to provide proper and adequate testing of all of Lower Manhattan including these two neighborhoods. My statement was to be presented at the Customs Courthouse for the WTC Technical Review Panel on March 31, 2004; however due to major a water leak and flooding, the panel stopped the proceedings and resumed today.

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

Founded in 1974 as the first Asian American public interest legal organization on the east coast, AALDEF conducts impact litigation, community education, and policy advocacy in the areas of civil rights, immigrant rights,

labor and employment rights, and voting rights. AALDEF represents garment and restaurant workers challenging sweatshop conditions, victims of anti-Asian violence and police brutality, indentured servants seeking political asylum, and South Asians and Muslims detained indefinitely by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement without adequate due process. AALDEF also conducts free legal rights clinics for immigrant families seeking legal advice on a range of immigration and citizenship matters. In addition, AALDEF has assisted thousands of persons in becoming U.S. citizens and registering them to vote once a week at the U.S. District Courthouse in Manhattan. My clients include family members who lost loved ones at the World Trade Center and immigrant families seeking relief assistance after the 9/11 tragedy.

#### Health Treatment and Studies Covering Chinatown and Lower Eastside

Since 9/11, AALDEF has worked jointly with organizations in the Beyond Ground Zero Network including Chinese Staff and Workers Association, National Mobilization against Sweatshops, Urban Justice Center, and Workers Awaaz to assist thousands of residents affected by the 9/11 tragedy; many of whom were not within the initial geographical boundaries or formal eligibility guidelines of relief programs administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, and other private relief organizations. AALDEF has worked to obtain health care coverage for many clients and to escort them, most of whom do not speak English, to medical clinics for testing and treatment. Recently, the Beyond Ground Zero Network has initiated a joint clinic at Bellevue hospital to test and treat our clients who wish to be patients and possible research subjects in order to study the environmental health impacts beyond ground zero. AALDEF clients who are residents of Chinatown and the Lower Eastside are experiencing more respiratory illnesses and suffer from rashes attributed to the 9/11 attacks. A young woman who worked with me to assist many residents to navigate FEMA, LMDC, and Safe Horizon programs became ill repeatedly with a range respiratory problems due to 2 years of exposure to post 9/11 dust and air found in clients' homes and in various offices in lower Manhattan. She has since moved out of New York City for both family reasons and in order to ease her asthma and hacking cough; however, she remains deeply concerned about the long term effects of the polluted air that she inhaled for months after 9/11.

Recently, I spoke to Dr. Allan Tso, a physician at the Charles B. Wang Health Center (a/k/a the Chinatown Health Clinic) and a co-author of the study conducted by Stony Brook University School of Medicine and the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. Dr. Tso asserted that his study reveals a statistical significance of asthma warranting further research and study. Their data consist of pre and post 9/11 information derived from the records of 205 Chinese American children with asthma. These children who live within 5 miles of ground zero had to visit their doctors more often for treatment and had to take more medicines for asthma one year after the 9/11 tragedy than the year preceding the World Trade Center attack. Tests were conducted to measure the children's air flow from their lungs within three months after 9/11. The test results indicate that their airways were narrowed and supports the hypothesis that their asthma became more severe after the 9/11 tragedy. As a result, your design for retesting and any further environmental testing of samples must take into account the health impact that extends at least 5 miles or more beyond ground zero. Disregarding this health data in your design for testing or retesting would be ignoring the obvious - that the limited environmental testing and subsequent clean-up were totally inadequate to protect the public health and welfare.

According to Dr. Joan Reibman, Associate Professor of Medicine and Environmental Medicine at New York University School of Medicine and Director of the Asthma Center, there was a sharp increase of reported respiratory problems after 9/11 among families living in Chatham Towers, Chatham Green, and Smith Projects located in Chinatown and the Lower Eastside. BGZ has been working with Dr. Reibman to initiate a joint clinic based at Bellevue Hospital to examine and treat our clients. She is about to publish a study covering the areas of Chinatown and the Lower Eastside. Her data and study would show that the health impact beyond ground zero is significant and warrants further study and adequate funding to do it. It also strongly suggests that further environmental testing must be extended beyond ground zero.

#### Conclusion

During 2002 at community town hall meetings, rallies, and marches in New York City and Washington, DC, thousands of Chinatown residents assisted by BGZ had demonstrated and demanded that health care coverage, medical treatment and research studies must be the top priorities for our government agencies and institutions committed to rebuilding New York. Health care must be made a priority with adequate resources to cover long term treatment and studies for all the people affected by 9/11 including residents of Chinatown and the Lower Eastside.

Government officials and agencies must be held accountable for the delay in initiating full health coverage, treatment, and studies covering the residents of Chinatown and the Lower Eastside. Almost 2 years later, the announcement of the Inspector Generals Report at the end of August of 2003, revealed the misconduct committed by the Environmental Protection Agency and perhaps the White House as well as the responsibility for this delay. Since 9/11, our leaders and government agencies failed to alert us about the public health emergency resulting from the attacks on 9/11 and have yet to acknowledge the full scope of the environmental damage and health risks created by dust and pollutants recirculated to and from homes, offices, and buildings throughout lower Manhattan including Chinatown and the Lower Eastside. Given the wide scope of harm and the shortage of resources targeted for health care and research studies covering people of color living in Chinatown and the Lower Eastside, we need a stronger commitment from our leaders and institutions to make these resources available. Otherwise, both the short term and long term health concerns among community residents will remain unaddressed despite the results of these research studies.