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Asian Law Caucus Marks 25th Anniversary of Historic Civil Rights Decision with Launch of Fred Korematsu Institute

SAN FRANCISCO – In honor of a man who became a civil rights icon for defying the mass internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the Asian Law Caucus will officially launch the Fred T. Korematsu Institute for Civil Rights and Education (<http://fredkorematsu.org>) at the organization's annual event on Thursday, April 30, in San Francisco.

“The Institute will play a role in a new era of collaborative efforts to further secure the rights of all people of color,” said Karen Korematsu-Haigh, Korematsu's daughter. “We want to develop and support a new generation of ambassadors of justice that embody my father's courage and conviction.”

“In the long history of our country's constant search for justice, some names of ordinary citizens stand for millions of souls ... Plessy, Brown, Parks. To that distinguished list, today we add the name of Fred Korematsu,” said President Bill Clinton in January 1998 in awarding Korematsu the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

During World War II, Korematsu was a 22-year-old welder in Oakland, Calif., who defied military orders that ultimately led to the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans, including Korematsu and his family who were removed from their homes, held first in the Tanforan Race Track Assembly Center in San Bruno, Calif., and then incarcerated in the Topaz internment camp in Utah.

He took his challenge to the military orders to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in 1944, upheld his conviction on the ground that the removal of Japanese Americans was justified by “military necessity.” That decision has been widely condemned as one of the darkest chapters in American legal history.

After four decades of having to live with a “disloyalty” conviction on his record that limited him from securing full-time work, Korematsu filed suit to reopen his case on proof that the government, when arguing his case during the war, had suppressed, altered, and destroyed material evidence that contradicted the government's claim of military necessity.

In 1984 – 25 years ago – the Federal District Court for the Northern District of California granted his petition for a writ of *coram nobis* (a notice of error) and vacated his conviction.

“Fred Korematsu's eventual court victory taught America about the fragility of civil rights especially during times of international tensions,” said attorney Dale Minami, a member of Korematsu's legal team. “It reinforced our belief that civil rights must be fought for and are not

simply guaranteed by the courts or by any governmental institution.”

Korematsu went on to champion the cause of civil liberties, not only seeking redress for Japanese Americans who were wrongfully interned, but also traveling the country to advocate for the civil rights of other victims of excessive government action, especially after 9/11.

Korematsu passed away in March 2005 at the age of 86.

Korematsu’s case remains a testament to the importance of preventing the erosion of civil liberties in the cause of national security.

“Fred Korematsu stood up not only for his own civil rights, but for all Americans and demanded that all Americans be protected by the inalienable rights set forth in our Constitution,” said Titi Liu, executive director of the Asian Law Caucus, the nation’s oldest legal and civil rights organization serving low-income Asian Pacific American communities.

In honor of the anniversary of the landmark Korematsu case, the Asian Law Caucus, in partnership with the Korematsu family, will launch the Fred T. Korematsu Institute for Civil Rights and Education to advance the cause of Asian American civil rights and human rights through pan-Asian American alliances and programs that focus on education, activism and leadership.

In a post-9/11 nation where national security policies are based on fear and prejudice, the Institute is dedicated to impacting the national discourse on national security policies by building alliances that foster understanding among different minority communities whose rights have been threatened by religious and racial profiling.

The Asian Law Caucus will launch the Institute at its 37th anniversary dinner on Thursday, April 30, from 6 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero in San Francisco. Thuy Vu, anchor/reporter for CBS Eyewitness News, will emcee the event, which will also include the showing of a short film on the Asian Law Caucus by Evan Jackson Leong.

The event will honor the Korematsu *coram nobis* legal team, including Lorraine Bannai, Marjie Barrows, Dennis Hayashi, Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, Peter Irons, Karen Kai, Donna Komure, Dale Minami, Leigh-Ann Miyasato, Robert Rusky, Donald Tamaki, Akira Togasaki and Eric Yamamoto. Other honorees include the Akonadi Foundation and its founders Quinn Delaney and Wayne Jordan; and Jason Lee, Holly Tate, Christopher Watson and Gavin Masuda of Latham & Watkins LLP.

To learn more about the dinner and the Korematsu Institute at the Asian Law Caucus, visit <http://www.fredkorematsu.org> or contact Audee Kochiyama-Holman at (415) 896-1701, ext. 131, or audeekh@asianlawcaucus.org.

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