



Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

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Press Release

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National Asian American Organizations Concerned With Omission of Hate Crimes Charge in the Murder of Cha Vang

Washington, D.C. – The Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), Hmong National Development, Inc. (HND) and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) are disappointed that law enforcement authorities did not charge James Nichols with a hate crime for the murder of Cha Vang in his preliminary hearing in Marinette County today. Nichols has already been charged with first-degree intentional homicide, being a felon in possession of a firearm and concealing a corpse, and he will be formally arraigned on March 19.

An autopsy revealed that Vang, who was murdered while hunting in Peshtigo, Wisconsin last month, had been shot once and stabbed six times in the neck, severing his jugular vein. According to the criminal complaint, a wooden stick was found protruding from his mouth, and his body was found hidden beneath a log and small debris of leaves and sticks. Nichols was arrested for the murder. Because of the viciousness of the murder and inflammatory statements about the Hmong made by Nichols to the police, many in the community have raised concerns that Vang's murder may have been hate-motivated.

This tragic killing of the Green Bay resident and father of five drew outrage from Asian American communities across the country, and follows on the heels of continued racial tensions between Hmong Americans and the greater Wisconsin and Minnesota communities. Hmong Americans have been particularly targeted over the past few years ranging from hate-related property destruction to bumper stickers advocating the killing of the Hmong.

"Hate crimes hurt not only their immediate victims, but serve to isolate entire communities as well," said Vincent A. Eng, deputy director of AAJC, a national organization that advocates for the civil rights of Asian Americans. "If this murder was in fact hate-motivated, law enforcement officials should do everything in their power to prosecute it accordingly to send a strong message that violence steeped in ethnic and racial bias will not be tolerated in our communities." He added, "It is unfortunate that the jury—the people of Wisconsin—will not be able to bring justice on the hate crime issue to this matter."

Sky Savail-Hotrich, interim chief executive officer of HND, an organization representing Hmong Americans nationwide, said "reassurance" for the Hmong community by local law enforcement that such crimes will not reoccur is critical. "The Hmong community needs to see that authorities are seriously addressing their concerns about hate crimes in this incident," she added.

Doua Thor, the executive director of SEARAC, a national organization representing Southeast Asian Americans, noted that even if Nichols is not charged with a hate crime under Wisconsin laws, "local authorities and law enforcement need to work with the community to address racial tensions existing in the state and prevent future incidents. We pledge to work closely with the local community and authorities toward this end."

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Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (www.searac.org) is a national organization advancing the interests of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans through leadership development, capacity building, and community empowerment. SEARAC serves as a coalition-builder and leader, carrying out action-oriented research projects, and strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations such as mutual assistance associations (MAAs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs). SEARAC also fosters civic engagement among Southeast Asian Americans, and represents our communities at the national level in Washington, DC.

Asian American Justice Center (www.advancingequality.org), formerly known as NAPALC, is a national organization dedicated to defending and advancing the civil and human rights of Asian Americans. It works closely with three affiliates – the Asian American Institute of Chicago (www.aaichicago.org), the Asian Law Caucus (www.asianlawcaucus.org) in San Francisco, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (www.apalc.org) in Los Angeles.

Hmong National Development, Inc. (www.hndinc.org) is a national, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization whose mission is to build capacity, develop leadership and empower the Hmong American community. HND envisions a vibrant Hmong American community leading in educational achievement, economic development, civic and cultural engagement and social justice.