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APALA GOING STRONG AFTER 25 YEARS!

Anaheim, CA - The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA) celebrated its 25th anniversary convention in Anaheim, California from August 18 to 20, 2017. The convention was attended by close to 650 participants from dozens of unions and community partners who united under the theme “25 Years of Resistance: Organize & Fight.”

Highlights included two separate solidarity actions, including a solidarity march and vigil for those who were killed and injured during the violent KKK and Neo-Nazi demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia. The convention elected Monica Thammarath from the National Education Association as the new APALA President – the youngest National President APALA has elected to date. The other officers elected were Tracy Lai, American Federation of Teachers (AFT); Michael Yee, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); Kim Geron, California Faculty Association; and Johanna Hester, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) who had served as APALA’s president for the past six years.

The convention also marked the passing of the torch from Greg Cendana who served for seven years as APALA’s executive director, to Alvina Yeh, the new executive director. The convention was also joined by a delegation of two dozen labor and peace activists from Okinawa and Japan who have been mobilizing against the proposed expansion of U.S. military bases on the island of Okinawa. The APALA convention unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the end to U.S. military base expansion on Okinawa. Other international guests were from Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and the Maldives.

Speakers included California State Treasurer John Chiang, AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre, AFSCME President Lee Saunders, and Women’s March Co-Chair Linda Sarsour. The 25th anniversary banquet honored Steven Moy from IBEW, Arlene Inouye from AFT, undocumented immigrant youth activist Yves Gomes from UFCW, and SEIU’s Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus.

The “resistance” theme of the convention emphasized APALA’s rejection of Trump’s and his administration’s racism, sexism, and homophobia, and his anti-worker and anti-immigrant positions. The convention delegates represented the rich diversity of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, and brought hundreds of young workers and youth activists to the forefront.

Pre-convention activities included organizing and political training for hundreds of young workers, rank-and-file union activists, and community allies. The convention passed a constitutional amendment to expand the ranks of APALA to include young workers, community allies, and other workers who are not currently union members but who embrace the fight for social and economic justice.

UAW 2121 from Connecticut attendee and delegate Christopher Nguyen said, "The unity and power I felt from this APALA 25th anniversary convention will remain with me. We're here to stay—and I want our community to be empowered to RESIST, ORGANIZE, AND FIGHT!"

Maria Castaneda, Secretary-Treasurer of 1199SEIU United Health Care Workers East and President of the SEIU API Caucus, commented: "APALA's role to grow the labor movement is vital. Organizing the unorganized, especially immigrant, formerly incarcerated, and young workers, and training rank and file workers into union leadership are so needed to build the power of our community and to broaden our movement to be more inclusive of everyone, including those at the margins."

Donald Tanaka of UA Local 250, a retiree and convention delegate from Gardena, CA, stated, "We must continue to strive to educate and inform workers on the important issues facing our country and our communities. We must work to build out partnerships in the building trades and other industries. Workers must have a voice, and it has to be heard on a national and international scale — APALA is that voice."

Jennifer Li of IFPTE Local 21 concluded: "This APALA convention was my first and I am so ready to kick down some doors. This is the first time in the 6 years that I've been in the labor movement that there is a place for me. I've always kept my head down and just did my work, because I knew it would be useless to acknowledge the problems within labor by myself. APALA felt like something I've NEVER felt in labor -- like home."

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The **Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance** (APALA), AFL-CIO was founded in 1992 as the first and only national organization for Asian Pacific American union members to advance worker, immigrant and civil rights.
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