

Inviting diversity in San Jose Day of Remembrance

By KRISTEN SATO

Nichi Bei Weekly Contributor

SAN JOSE — San Jose's Nihonmachi Outreach Committee organized the 33rd annual Day of Remembrance event, held at the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin annex Feb. 18 in Japantown. The Day of Remembrance is recognized widely in cities across the U.S. and commemorates the signing of Executive Order 9066, which then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed in 1942, authorizing the imprisonment of some 120,000 individuals of Japanese descent in concentration camps across the country.

San Jose's Day of Remembrance this year also recognized the 25th anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, a formal apology granting reparations to *Nikkei* who were incarcerated by the U.S. government during World War II. The Civil Liberties Act stated that the government's actions "were motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

San Jose's Day of Remembrance program, "The Changing Face of America," included a performance from San Jose Taiko, a candle-lighting ceremony, and a candlelight procession through Japantown. The event also included members of the Sikh and Islamic communities, two groups who have been targeted by prejudice and violence since 9/11.

Special guest speakers included Simran Kaur, advocacy manager of the Sikh Coalition, Molly Kitajima, a Japanese Canadian incarcerated by the Canadian government during World War II, Rep. Mike Honda, and Sara Jaka from the South Bay Islamic Association. Representatives from the Sikh community joined the San Jose Day of Remembrance, for the first time ever.

Kaur of the Sikh Coalition noted the similar experiences that the *Nikkei* and Sikh communities have experienced. "During World War II, 120,000 Japanese were interned in the name of national security. When Japanese Americans were ordered to camps, almost no one spoke up for them. Like the post-9/11 persecution of Muslims and Sikhs...internment during World War II was deemed reasonable through the fog of fear."

Kaur also referenced targeted acts of violence toward Sikhs, in-



DIVERSE UNITY — (Clockwise, from the top left): Molly Kitamura, a former Japanese Canadian wartime inmate and Simran Kaur, of the Sikh Coalition joined San Jose's Day of Remembrance event. The ceremony included a procession through Japantown.

photos by Andy Frazer



cluding the recent temple massacre in Oak Creek, Wis. "Although it will be important to understand what motivates this type of violence ... we should draw upon our American, Sikh, Muslim, and Japanese traditions and continue to respond with love and compassion. Let us stand up together and turn the tragedy in Wisconsin into a turning point for our nation."

Sara Jaka from the South Bay Islamic Association added, "The message we walk away with from today's event is that we must take it upon ourselves to engage people of different backgrounds, and hear their stories as they are meant to be told. Only then can we think critically about the news that is presented around us and combat the demonization of our brothers and sisters of different faiths and cultures."

"The Changing Face of America" theme emphasized honoring diversity and unity in the community, remembering the mistakes of the past, looking ahead to the future, and celebrating differences as a nation.

Honda encouraged the audience to be proactive in seeking accurate information to break stereotypes, and focusing on similarities rather than differences: "We have common issues that we needed to address in this country in terms of justice, equity, fair treatment under the Constitution, ... It is something we need to do on a daily basis based on information and not ignorance; (but rather) based upon knowledge and learning... That makes us better consumers, and not victims of propaganda."

Nihonmachi Outreach Committee representative Will Kaku stated, "We now have a moral responsibility to defend our neighbors, our friends, our classmates, our community, all people, when they are the targets of discrimination." Addressing the younger generation present in the audience, Kaku said, "You will travel what I believe is the road to a better future, paved by the experiences, by the suffering, by the pain, by hope and aspirations, of the generations that came before you."

Berkeley *Nikkei* students discuss wartime incarceration



REMEMBERING THE PAST, CONNECTING WITH THE PRESENT — Ben Takeshita (above) lights the candle representing the Tule Lake concentration camp during the candle lighting ceremony. Civil rights attorney Veena Debul (right) shares her experiences dealing with racial discrimination against Muslim Americans in national security contexts as Takeshita listens.

photos by Heather Ito/Nichi Bei Weekly



By HEATHER ITO
Nichi Bei Weekly Contributor

BERKELEY, Calif. — The University of California, Berkeley's *Nikkei* Student Union celebrated their fifth annual Day of Remembrance Feb. 21.

The event, which commemorates the World War II incarceration of some 120,000 persons of Japanese descent in American concentration camps, included a chorus performance from the club's very own *Nikkei* Choral Ensemble (NiCE), as well as speeches from speakers and a candle lighting presentation to remember each of the wartime concentration camps.

"It's important for us to remember the messages of the past (and) to realize that we're facing these same sorts of struggles today," said NSU Culture Show Producer and Director Jeremy Chan.

NSU usually holds the event in conjunction with the Muslim Student Association, but they could not attend this year because of scheduling conflicts. Sana Jahani, officer of External Affairs at the association, wrote a message to the *Nikkei* group, expressing her disappointment in not being able to attend, as well as her appreciation toward NSU's support for racial justice among the Muslim American community.

"For me, this event means that the possibilities of internment, wartime sabotage and espionage, political bigotry are real; that other communities have faced it, and that my own community might face it as well, if we do not take real steps towards action now," she said in the message read by event coordinator Jana Hopkins.

NSU member Emma Chikamatsu said she was most impressed by the event collaboration with the Muslim group.

"I really liked the idea of collaborating with the Muslim Student Association because it's not only a story about the Japanese American community, it can be expanded and applied to other communities as well."

The event began with NiCE's

a cappella performance of "Hanamizuki," a Japanese song inspired by the events of Sept. 11, according to Hopkins.

Following the performance, Ben Takeshita, an 82-year-old *Nisei*, spoke about his experiences in the concentration camps and why it's important to learn about these injustices.

"The more (the *Nisei*) realized that if we don't speak out, then this could happen again to the Chinese, the Arabs, the Muslims and so on," he said. "So it's very important, more so in this day and age, for us to speak out and remember that it happened here in the United States and we must make sure that it doesn't happen again."

Takeshita, who joined the JACL's efforts for redress, has been sharing his story for decades. Over the years, Takeshita said he realized people were interested in learning about what happened in the concentration camps. He has been making speeches at high schools and grammar schools around El Cerrito, Calif. and other areas, since then.

Civil rights attorney Veena Debul shared her experiences dealing with racial discrimination against Muslim Americans in national security contexts.

"I think for our community (and) newer immigrant communities, it was a kind of vital solidarity and these kinds of events, I think particularly for this generation that grew up in kind-of a post-9/11 world, it's really important to see the connections being made, to learn to struggle together and to see how the plight of an earlier generation is being remade in a new generation in a new community," she said.

Hopkins said these speakers were chosen for the significance of the stories they had to share.

"I believe we were fortunate to have speakers whose personal lives were affected, and they gave strong and powerful messages which I believe caused the audiences to think deeply about the issues, rather than a movie or other visual representations," Hopkins said.

Northern California Time of Remembrance



HONORING A HERO — (Above): Roy Matsumoto with Rep. Doris O. Matsui (Right): Florin JACL President Marielle Tsukamoto presents Matsumoto with a Daruma and plaque.

photos by Devin Yoshikawa

