

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Recently, a group of U.S. national security leaders signed a letter raising alarm about the surge in anti-Asian racism in the context of COVID-19, and concern that prejudice and stigmatization undermine American values of hope and U.S. leadership abroad.

We, the undersigned Members of the U.S. Senate, echo these concerns.

We, too, are alarmed by the severity and increasing frequency of hate crimes and race-based harassment against Asians and members of the Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in the United States—assaults that endanger their safety, well-being, dignity, and livelihoods.¹ U.S. leaders in every sector and at every level — including in both the Executive and Legislative branches of our government — must take action against anti-Asian racism and express support for Asian diaspora and AAPI communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents urgent threats to America’s health, prosperity, and national security. It has brought out the best of our nation: healthcare workers have labored around the clock to care for patients, scientists have raced to develop a vaccine and therapeutics, and local officials and community leaders have taken action to ensure the most vulnerable among us have access to supplies and services.

Alarmingly, the crisis has also spawned numerous disturbing incidents of racism and discrimination in the United States. On March 20, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights expressed concern over the sharp rise in violent attacks against Asian Americans.² It is imperative that we make clear that the enemy in our midst is not the Asian or Asian-American community, but rather a virus that endangers us all.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises discussing the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in ways that reduce and avoid stigma, while refraining from using any terms (such as “Chinese virus” or “Wuhan virus”) that exacerbate prejudice and discrimination in ways

¹ Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil, *NBC News*, March 26, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-report-nearly-500-racist-acts-over-last-week-n1169821>; Josh Margolin, *ABC News*, March 27, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-warns-potential-surge-hate-crimes-asian-americans/story?id=69831920>

² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, March 20, 2020. https://www.usccr.gov/press/2020/03-20-Racism-and-Coronavirus-Stmt.pdf?mod=article_inline

that place lives at risk of violence.³ We must counter the mistaken belief that there is any link between the virus and a person's ethnicity. Such misconceptions have contributed to a surge of hate crimes against AAPI communities, acting as a pretext for individuals who exploited this crisis as an opportunity to harm people whose racial and ethnic backgrounds differ from their own.

We represent diverse states and communities, and some of us have also been personally targeted by prejudice. All of us must stand today in solidarity with the Asian and AAPI communities and amplify the many statements of concern that AAPI leaders and community organizations have issued in recent weeks.⁴

We believe that our nation is strongest when we live up to our guiding principles, including the embrace of equality and diversity. Intolerance and stigmatization risk dividing our society and hurting our most vulnerable precisely when we must unite and stand strong to confront the pandemic.

History teaches us that injustice and divisions in the United States have been exploited domestically for political purposes and can be exploited by other governments for strategic purposes. Racist rhetoric and hateful attacks against Asians and members of the AAPI community are unjust and utterly inconsistent with our core values. Such incidents also play into the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda and messaging in ways that undermine our unity, national interests, and global leadership.

Once the worst of this global crisis is past, it will be important to re-examine the factors and decisions that facilitated the rapid global diffusion of the outbreak from its origin in China, including the initial failure of the Chinese government to heed the concerns of doctors and its efforts to suppress the warnings of whistleblowers and downplay the danger of the virus. For the time being, however, we must prioritize and concentrate on mobilizing an effective response that overcomes initial missteps, while galvanizing the international collaboration that is critical to constraining this global threat.

U.S. policy to address the pandemic must respect and defend human rights and civil liberties. The novel coronavirus presents a major threat to the health and wellbeing of all people in the United States, but the Asian diaspora and AAPI communities now face harmful rhetoric and even horrifying physical violence. We must prioritize, at this perilous moment, reducing those dangers to the greatest extent possible.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 30, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/reducing-stigma.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fsymptoms-testing%2Freducing-stigma.html


⁴ National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, March 11, 2020. http://www.ncapaonline.org/aapi_leaders_and_over_260_civil_rights_organizations_call_on_congress_to_denounce_anti_asian_racism; Asian Americans Advancing Justice, February 19, 2020. <https://advancingjustice-aajc.org/press-release/asian-americans-advancing-justice-statement-discrimination-and-coronavirus-epidemic>

Recognizing the urgency of this crisis and the imperative of combating the prejudices that have intensified in its wake, we pledge to work with you to confront the racism that so many encounter in their daily lives, in online and offline settings, and to tackle systemic prejudice even as we combat this unprecedented pandemic.


Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United State Senator

Sent on behalf of the following signatories:

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Jackie Rosen
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Christopher Van Hollen
United States Senator