

## “Stop the War on Immigrants”

# Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington

**O**n February 15, Sherman Alexie, Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian poet and author, and three immigrant speakers addressed a crowd of 40,000 at Seattle Center. The rally and march, *Stop the War on Iraq! Stop the War on Immigrants!* proceeded for four hours through downtown Seattle to the INS detention center.

Their message: there is an unmistakable link between the war on Iraq and the domestic “war on terrorism.” Immigrant detentions, deportations and racial profiling, like other civil rights abuses under the Bush administration, violate our Constitution and gravely endanger American principles and character. The rally’s message came out of a collaboration between Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington and the Not in Our Name Project, who together recruited peace and labor organizations to join in an international day of protest by making that critical link.

Asha Mohamed, a first generation Somali immigrant, helped emcee the event. “When I came here my entire vision was have babies, go to law school,” she says. “But when you see people stop living, and they become fearful of everything, they tell you they have no rights, they tell you people can walk all over them, you have to do something.” Mohamed had been an advocate for Somali women, children and men for eight years. But after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, she saw things get much worse.

### September 11, 2001

In the wake of the attacks, Somalis, Sikhs and Arab Americans were targeted for physical assault, verbal harassment, bullying in schools and housing and employment discrimination. “With humans, once they get to that deep emotional darkness, they don’t see the light anymore,” Mohamed says. “People coming to the U.S. have to learn the language, learn how to take the bus, find a job, interact with their children’s teachers. But they don’t get a break—the supermarket, the landlord, the doctor, the teachers are all harassing them. When I see it twice a week or three times I have this deep emptiness and sadness for humanity and it drives me crazy.”

Mohamed is now Outreach Coordinator for Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington, formed in direct response to the backlash. Many recent and established immigrant communities under fire were not connected to the political system, even as they bore the greater burden of a discriminatory social and political climate. Leaders in those communities voiced a need to have a coordinating body to work with community organizations, victims of backlash, lawmakers and the media to highlight their views on questions of policy, legislation and law enforcement. Hate Free Zone was founded by immigrant activist and writer Pramila Jayapal. With a staff of seven and support from a broad array of local and national immigrant, community, peace and social justice organizations, Hate Free Zone has become that unifying force within Washington state.

### New threats

It quickly became clear that the work of Hate Free Zone extended far beyond barriers to service access and hate crimes. We have seen waves of new and ramped-up government targeting on the basis of national origin, religion and race. The proposed Domestic Security Enhancement Act, commonly called Patriot II, is the latest taste of what’s to come from this Administration (see page 18). It demonstrates that, while once again non-citizens will bear the heaviest and most immediate burden, ultimately no one will be safe from curtailment of their civil rights.

The adoption of repressive “security” legislation since September 11, vigorously implemented by a growing federal law enforcement apparatus, has been matched by a growing fear and sense of powerlessness in immigrant communities—one

by Liza Wilcox



Credit: Hate Free Zone

**Asha Mohamed:** “When they tell you people can walk all over them, you have to do something.”

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*“Not again!  
Sixty years  
ago, it never  
should have  
happened.”*

— Mako  
Nakagawa

## “Stop the War on Immigrants”

which is sometimes shared by their advocates. “It’s anger, desperation really, the need for change and not knowing how to get that change. You can see the passion that they have, but they are consumed with horror, and they can’t get beyond that,” says Mohamed.

The attacks on constitutional rights by President Bush, Attorney General Ashcroft and now Homeland Security Czar Tom Ridge, have started with immigrants and dovetail with widespread acceptance of the notion that there is an inherent tradeoff between safety and civil liberties. According to a recent study by the Kennedy School of Government and Harvard Law School, “After the 9/11 terrorism attack, society’s expectations of terrorism losses associated with any given level of civil liberties changed dramatically.

Perceived risks rose for any level of civil liberties, and the marginal cost of civil liberties increased dramatically.” This belief persists in spite of the chorus of protests that racial profiling does not work, and evidence that “war on terror”

measures have actually exposed the nation to more danger. The study also found that the level of support for racial profiling at airports by white respondents was roughly double that for nonwhite respondents.

### A National Embarrassment

Hardeep Singh, a 24-year-old Sikh American, is familiar with this phenomenon. “Although they claim that all searches are random, I have been searched about 80 percent of the time I fly,” Singh testified at a public hearing marking the anniversary of September 11. “I remember sitting next to a woman after going through multiple searches. She told the person next to her that she didn’t under-

stand why people complain about being searched at the airport. . . . I asked her how many times she had been searched: she responded by saying once, [in] three or four flights. I told her I had been searched 8 times; I had flown probably 5 or 6 times. . . . What bothers me the most is that when the public constantly see a certain group of people being picked out of the crowd on a consistent basis they also become suspicious of that group.”

Singh was speaking to a crowd of 1,000 packed into Seattle Town Hall. Hate Free Zone Campaign had convened 30 immigrant and community groups to plan an event that would acknowledge the huge impact of September 11 and raise awareness of the grave situation facing targeted communities, while feeling safe for all to attend. To highlight funda-

mental American principles while illustrating the pain caused by a cycle of fear, prejudice and discriminatory legislation, the coalition held a public hearing modeled on the Senate hearings on Japanese American internment held in the early 1980s. A panel of local, state

and federal elected officials and representatives from the INS, FBI and Department of Justice listened to moving personal accounts from two dozen people.

Twelve-year-old Samer Hamoui testified on behalf of his siblings, who were longing for the release of their parents and sister—detained for 9 months. Hamoui’s mother was seriously ill, and his sister developed kidney stones in the overcrowded detention center. His story was too familiar to Mako Nakagawa, a Japanese American who was interned with her family in 1942. “Not again! Sixty years ago, it never should have happened,” said Nakagawa. “We heard these stories 60 years ago and one legacy from our experience we were hoping for, is that it would never happen again.”



Hate Free Zone founder Pramila Jayapal at a public hearing modeled on those addressing Japanese American internment

Credit: Hate Free Zone