PRESS RELEASE
February 25, 2009

APALC Applauds Long-Overdue Payments to Filipino American Veterans

LOS ANGELES, CA –The Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) commends the U.S. Congress for awarding Filipino American veterans of World War II partial payment of their long-overdue veteran benefits. The payments represent recognition of the courage and sacrifice of Filipinos who fought under U.S. command in World War II.

According to the Los Angeles Times, over 400,000 Filipino soldiers fought alongside U.S. troops in the Pacific during World War II. Only 15,000 – less than 4% – are thought to be still alive. The veterans have waited for more than 60 years for the veteran benefits promised by the U.S. government.

Congress passed this bill under a provision in the stimulus bill signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009. Each Filipino veteran who is a U.S. citizen is eligible for $15,000 and each Filipino citizen is eligible for $9,000.

“Many people are inquiring about the process to claim the benefits. It has been so long that all are worried how this money will come to them before they pass away,” said Franco Arcebal, Vice President of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans.

While Congress’ action results in only a partial payment to the veterans, the bill is a major milestone in the long campaign for Filipino veteran justice. The campaign which started in the late 1980s highlighted injustices and urged policy makers to grant the same benefits to World War II Filipino veterans as their American counterparts.

As a proud supporter of Filipino Americans veteran leaders and their movement, APALC’s involvement has included the following:

- Starting in the late 1980s, APALC advocated for US citizenship for Filipino veterans who had been promised this right but were denied citizenship for decades.
- In the 1990s, APALC tried to expose the legal discrimination in the Rescission Act of 1946 that rescinded the benefits promised to Filipino veterans by General Douglas MacArthur.
- In the early 1990s, Tony Doroño from APALC was one of the first to convene a local conference at the University of Southern California to raise awareness that hundreds of thousands of World War II Filipino veterans were not getting the same military benefits awarded to World War II American veterans.
- In 2004, APALC through its joint legislative project in Sacramento (Asian Americans for Civil Rights & Equality) helped mobilize Filipino American veterans and advocacy groups to oppose a proposal to end state-funded benefits for elderly Filipino veterans. As a result, state legislators rejected the proposal.

Contact:
Carmina Ocampo, Asian Pacific American Legal Center
(213) 977-7500 ext.268
More recently, APALC has supported the efforts of local Filipino American organizations. For example, Stewart Kwoh, Executive Director of APALC, helped identify critical funding for Filipino American Service Group Inc’s (FASGI) Health Service Projects, which focuses on veterans and the elderly.

The bill is the result of the tireless commitment and leadership of many Filipino American organizations, Filipino veteran leaders, and lawmakers fighting for the proper compensation and recognition of Filipino veterans. Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Senate Appropriations committee and a World War II veteran, pushed to include the payment in the stimulus bill, with support from Representative Bob Filner (D-Chula Vista), who has been a leader in the campaign for 12 years.

APALC’s continued concern is revealed in Stewart Kwoh’s new book, Untold Civil Rights Stories: Asian American Speak out for Justice to be released in May 2009. Mang Peping Baclig a Filipino American World War II hero and veteran leader is featured in a story written by Casimiro U. Tolentino, former APALC Board Chair. Baclig said “Lump sum or not, the reward here is our community came together and no one was against this equity rights advocacy.”

# # #