Letter from Survivor Alliance Executive Director Re: Survivor Alliance Commitment to the Atlanta Shootings and Rise in Anti-Asian Racism

09 April 2021

Dear Survivor Alliance allies and friends,

2020 was an extremely difficult year for many people all over the globe. As a community we are just starting to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic and working towards the light at the end of a long tunnel. We also had the rise of police brutality, and we further affirm our commitment to the Black Lives Matter Movement.

This letter today however is in respect to the rise in violence against Asians in the United States, with reference to the unfortunate event of the Atlanta shootings. I have written and re-written this letter many times, as an issue that is extremely close to home for me it was difficult to know where to begin; therefore, I begin by saying that Survivor Alliance does, and always will stand steadfast with the Asian Community. To all our Asian allies, friends and members, I extend my sincerest heartfelt condolences to anyone affected by the rise in Asian hate crimes over the last few weeks and months.

Survivor Alliance wholeheartedly condemns bigotry and hatred in all its forms and is deeply committed to the fight against racism and our commitment for social justice for all members of our society.

Anti-Asian racism is not a new issue, globally we have seen an immediate rise in hatred towards the Asian communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by Michelle Au, the first East Asian ever to be elected to the Georgia senate: “It’s a new chapter in a very old story, and it is horrifying.”

There are over 20 million Asian-Americans living in the United States, many of whom will have at some point in their lives been a target of racism, the United States has not done enough to target Anti-Asian bias in recent times, which is highlighted by former president Trump’s comments on China in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps with a change of leadership we may finally see action taken to combat this bias, allowing the Asian community to feel safer.

A key point that should not be overlooked is the link between racism and sexism; particularly the issues regarding the hyper-sexualization of Asian women. The perpetrator of the horrific Atlanta shootings referred to this as one of his reasons behind his actions, the need to rid himself of his “temptations”. This issue is deeply embedded in Western Culture, look no further than the common stereotype of Asian prostitutes, or the issues in relation to sexualizing women of color, who have long been exoticized and sexualized, from Hollywood Movies to TV shows, books or the long-lasting effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act; the hyper-sexualization of Asian women needs to stop. In doing so Asian women are being dehumanized, viewed as objects as opposed to real people, with real feelings. It has not long since been that many Asian women were forced into “comfort stations” during world war 2, as a community we should not overlook nor forget the long-lasting repercussions of the heinous acts that were committed against Asian women during this time period.
We want to lay out some actions that Survivor Alliance has taken on board and that you can be sure to hold us accountable for.

1. **We are making our anti-oppression lens clearer to others.**
   We will continue to welcome members of any background and walk of life.

2. **We have changed our Ground Rules to explicitly name our anti-oppressive lens.** We are making a commitment to intervene when and where we see oppressive dynamics occurring in events we hold.

3. **We will continually train and educate our staff and members** - Every month, our staff reflects on Survivor Alliance Values. In 2021, we are focusing specifically on how language oppression is part of racism. We are making sure that materials are translated, we are hiring interpreters and translators more often, and budgeting for these required services. For our members, we have enhanced our leadership training curriculum on intersectional anti-oppression work. **We are discussing the importance of recognizing our social positionality in all that we do.**

4. **We will practice with our members and allies the skills of having uncomfortable conversations with ourselves and each other.** It is clear that our society needs people who can face discomfort within themselves and recognise their own biases. This is a difficult skill but must be nurtured. We also must become more skilled at listening and speaking about racism. This means being aware of your own privilege, knowing when to leave space for others, speaking authentically, and not centering yourself if you are not a part of the harmed group.

5. **We will support systems, groups, and people that are working to dismantle Anti-Asian racism.** We will shine a light on these organisations and recommend resources for anti-racist education.

6. **We will respectfully challenge our allies and members when racism shows up in anti-slavery and anti-trafficking work.** We do this in an effort to protect our members, staff, and allies against racism outside the organisation and to relieve Asian people from the burden of educating people about racism.
7. **We will listen to any concerns about racism within Survivor Alliance and take them seriously.** We do not profess to be free of racism. We will be mindful that "making it" as an organization can pressure us to take on practices that are valued by dominant society, but that contain racist elements or roots.

8. **We will hold space for our Asian members, staff, and allies.** We will not define what this space should look like and will respond as best as we can to your needs. When racism comes up in an event, we will challenge it, check-in with you, and do what is in our power to address it.

We would like to honor Delaina Ashley Yaun, Daoyou Feng, Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue and all the other victims of the Atlanta shootings. Our thoughts go out to your friends and families.

We also honor the lives of Asian lives in Britain and anywhere else who are victims of Anti-Asian Racism.

We are grieving with each of you and your communities.

To our Asian allies, we stand with you.

To allies who wish that we would make a statement about any other injustice, I hear you. This is a profound moment in our world's history. Let us hope this is the beginning of a new Civil Rights Movement, the Black Lives Matter movement is evidence that people are long sick and tired of racism, and the fight against racism is continuing forwards.

Yours truly, on behalf of all Survivor Alliance Board Members,

Sufayan Ali
Board Member & Trustee,
Survivor Alliance
Birmingham, United Kingdom
info@survivoralliance.org
+44 (0) 0121 809 6410
+1 (510) 560 - 4351