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IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS ADVOCATES HONORED FOR THEIR DECADES OF SERVICE AT NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

Charles Wheeler, Deena Jang, and the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice Will Receive Awards in Honor of their Commitment to Low-Income Immigrants' Rights

WASHINGTON – On December 7, 2009, advocates Charles Wheeler and Deena Jang, as well as the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, will be honored at the National Immigration Law Center's 30th anniversary dinner for their work to improve the lives of low-income immigrants. The awardees were selected in honor of their courageous efforts both with the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) and other allies on various issues affecting immigrants, including detainee rights, immigrant access to health care and other services, and workers' rights.

"Charles, Deena, and the Workers' Center all show a tireless commitment to ensuring that our nation's low-income immigrants are treated with the fairness and dignity they deserve," said Allen Erenbaum, chairman of NILC's Board of Directors. "These advocates have been at the forefront of many of the major immigration battles this nation has faced over the past three decades, and many legal and political victories affecting low-income immigrants' lives can be attributed to their efforts."

Charles Wheeler is a senior attorney with Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) in San Francisco and directs its Training and Legal Support section. He served as NILC's first executive director. Under his eleven-year tenure (1985-1996), he broadly expanded the organization's immigration law trainings, publications, and technical support. During that period NILC also undertook landmark litigation and grew from a two-attorney project of a local legal aid program to an independent nonprofit agency staffed by six attorneys serving in Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Wheeler positioned NILC as the national experts in immigrant eligibility for public benefits and initiated an employment rights program, both of which still serve as two of its pillars. A 30-year veteran in the field, Wheeler is a graduate of the University of Virginia and the University of Maryland School of Law.

Deena Jang is the policy director for the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF).

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She leads APIAHF's work to improve access to health coverage and quality of care, expand linguistically and culturally competent health services, promote a more diverse health care workforce, improve data on Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health, and encourage investment in community-driven health strategies. For decades, Jang has worked tirelessly to champion the rights of immigrants, including survivors of domestic violence, and low-wage workers, and continues to serve as a key partner in health reform issues. She played a critical role in securing federal legislation to protect immigrant rights to benefits, status, and independence from abusers. She launched and served on the boards of several organizations, and helped build national and local coalitions promoting the rights of low-income families. Jang has been an important mentor for young lawyers, law students and advocates. She is a graduate of Oberlin College and the King Hall School of Law at UC Davis.

New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice is dedicated to building the power and participation of immigrant and African American workers and communities in the Gulf Coast. The Center was founded after Hurricane Katrina, in the context of massive African American exclusion and immigrant exploitation. Since then, the Center has projected workers' voices from the day labor corners, labor camps, and detention centers of the Gulf Coast into key policy discussions in Congress. The Center's relentless organizing and advocacy in the hardest hit communities have won critical victories for workers in the face of extraordinary crises. And the Center's cutting-edge multiracial, multipronged strategies have contributed to advancing a poor people's movement for racial and economic justice in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

The National Immigration Law Center is dedicated to promoting and advancing the rights of low-income immigrants and their family members. Over the last 30 years, NILC has helped usher in landmark litigation victories, supported the organizing and advocacy efforts of numerous community groups and activists across the country, and fought for more humane and just immigration and immigrant-related policies and laws.

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For more information about how you can become an advocate for immigrants' rights, please visit www.nilc.org.

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