



MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

From left: Cedrick Shimo, Helga Aguayo and Dr. Laila Al-Marayati speak during a panel discussion at the 2007 Day of Remembrance commemoration held Saturday, at the Japanese American National Museum.

## Within One's Conscience

The 65th Day of Remembrance commemoration honors 'resisters of conscience.'

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"Many consider my husband's actions to be heroic," Helga P. Aguayo spoke of her husband Agustin at the 2007 Day of Remembrance commemoration event held Saturday, at the Japanese American National Museum. "I am sure he would say it's the only thing he could have possibly done."

Aguayo was one of the discussion panelists at Saturday's event, which marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 to remove and incarcerate over 120,000 Japanese Americans in the West Coast states.

This year, the annual commemoration took place to debate how citizens have challenged executive decisions and whether presidents have abused executive power. During the discussion titled "From 'Military Necessity' to 'National Security': Challenging the Use of Executive



Becerra

Power from World War II to Iraq," three panelists talked about their personal experiences of fighting against the government to an audience that was apparently charged by anti-war sentiment.

Medical Corpsman Agustin Aguayo, who has been charged with desertion and missing movement, is currently awaiting court-martial in March and sits in pre-trial confinement in Germany. After his deployment to Iraq in 2004-2005, Aguayo applied to be a conscientious objector and since then has refused to participate in any war. However, his request has been denied and he turned himself in to military authorities after he was absent without leave. If convicted, he faces a felony charge and up to seven years in prison.

"My husband believes that all wars are immoral and wrong," the wife said during the discussion. "How can the courts say that my husband isn't sincere and he doesn't fulfill the requirement of being a conscientious objector when he has put so much on that line? How do they justify this?"

Helga Aguayo lived for over three years on a military base in Germany with her husband and two daughters. She now organizes Agustin's campaign and support systems in Europe and the United States.

Aguayo spoke of the letter she received from an Army officer who had been inspired by Agustin to apply for

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conscientious objector discharge, but was afraid to do so. "I think my husband is a hero because he inspires others. He is taking a huge personal expense and he did this because it's the only thing he could do. He is taking a stand for all of those who believe that war is immoral and wrong," she said.

"People who can make a change need to hear from people who suffer."

The other two panelists were Cedrick Shimo, WWII veteran of Company B, 1800<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Battalion, a segregated group consisting of German, Italian and Japanese American servicemen who were considered to be potential troublemakers and kept under surveillance; and Dr. Laila Al-Marayati, a spokeswoman for the Muslim Women's League and board member of the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC).

Al-Marayati said that she has been harassed by FBI and detained at LAX for her involvement with Muslim charity organizations, but she will not refrain herself from doing what she believes is right.

"It's our right as Americans, on behalf of my children, your children and everyone, to continue to fight to maintain the rights that we've endeared for so many years," she said. "We are not afraid. We lose things and we sacrifice, but still continue because of who we are as Americans. To me, that's the only way we can make the point."

Al-Marayati acknowledged the enormity of the Japanese American internment experience and how many JAs have reached out to her own community to express their support.

Also present at the event, Rep. Xavier Becerra addressed the current status of legislation on behalf of the Japanese Latin American redress issue and the passing of Resolution 663, which opposes the Bush administration's policies on the war in Iraq.

Recently appointed as assistant to the Speaker of the House, Becerra reminded the audience that history always repeats itself. "We cannot afford to have this country repeat its mistakes," he stated.

"I hope that what you saw, what you heard, and what you feel today will animate you to help us change the direction this country has taken," the Congressman continued. "I dare say, I believe I can say this with confidence, that men and women in uniform in Iraq are waiting for you to stand up as well."

Day of Remembrance 2007 commemoration was sponsored by Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress, Japanese American Citizens League, Pacific Southwest District, and Japanese American National Museum.