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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid's Exploitation Intervention Project's Response To The Gendered And Racist Asian Violence That Recently Took Place Near Atlanta, Georgia

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society's Exploitation Intervention Project** released the following statement in response to the gendered and racist Asian violence that happened earlier this week near Atlanta, Georgia:

“On Tuesday, March 16, 2021, Asian massage parlor workers woke up to the news of extreme violence they feared would occur to them every single day they go to work.

Eight people (six of whom were Asian women) were murdered in massage parlors in the Buckhead area of Atlanta, Georgia by a white cis male who was a frequent patron of these parlors. While the suspect claimed he had a ‘sex addiction’ and murdered these individuals because they were ‘temptations ... he wanted to eliminate,’ it is apparent that these slayings were racially motivated. Nonetheless, Captain Jay Butler of the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office refused to acknowledge this reality, stating that the perpetrator ‘had a really bad day.’ Notably, months earlier, Captain Jay Butler posted on social media blaming ‘CHY-NA’ for COVID-19.

This combination of racist violence, misogyny, and law enforcement protection of white suspected perpetrators of harm is nothing new for communities of color and for Asian massage parlor workers specifically. In fact, it is their everyday reality. Our clients routinely endure physical and sexual violence from customers, sexual assault from law-enforcement officers who then arrest them, and are forcibly detained via ICE raids where they are charged with deportable offenses.

However, this mass murder is symptomatic of a larger, more pervasive legacy of interlocking gender and race oppression for Asian women. Asian femme bodies have long been subjected to hyper sexualization, exoticism, and glamorized for stereotype submissiveness. This dehumanization has been linked to staggering rates of intimate partner violence and formed the basis for some of the country's first exclusionary immigration laws.

The Trump administration fueled this historical discrimination with multiple xenophobic and racist comments connecting the COVID-19 pandemic to Chinese communities. There has been an unprecedented surge in AAPI racist attacks in the pandemic, with 68% of reported attacks victimizing Asian women.

We are now at a potential turning point in our history. The Exploitation Intervention Project demands the following to end this cycle:

- To Captain Jay Baker: Racial and gender motivated violence amplified by xenophobia and misogyny cannot be rebranded as anything else. The suspect you arrested did not frequent massage parlors for sexual services with white employees. He chose multiple massage parlors with primarily Asian employees and he verbalized his need to eradicate this specific group to prevent his specific ‘temptation.’ Law enforcement must acknowledge and repudiate this clear racist and gendered target to ensure other white men do not perceive themselves as free to resort to such acts of harm when they have ‘bad days.’
- To Prosecutors: if you believe your job is to protect all communities, we urge you to listen to Asian massage parlor workers and align your prosecutions with the justice objectives identified by survivors of racist gendered violence. Combating white supremacy on a systemic level must be a central objective of every prosecutor’s office, in particular Georgia prosecutors should utilize the hate crime law passed in the wake of Ahmaud Arbery’s slaying.
- To City and State governments: decriminalize sex work and regulate labor such as massage work. Collect data on racist acts of violence and make such data culturally competent and readily accessible during the pandemic so that members of marginalized communities may be encouraged to come forward for assistance without fear or stigma.
- To the Department of Labor: work alongside Asian massage parlor workers to understand how to extend effective labor and anti-retaliatory protections to stigmatized and marginalized immigrant workers, which will encourage them to report exploiters, traffickers, and violent customers.
- To the Biden Administration and Merrick Garland: we urge you to identify such acts of gendered and racist violence carried out upon Delaina Ashley Yaun, Paul Andre Michels, Xiaojie Yan, and Xiaojie Yan, and the four unnamed victims as acts of domestic terrorism.

And most importantly, to our clients, the families of the victims, and the larger Asian massage parlor community:

同心合力 , 저희가 기억하고 잊지 않겠습니다, Pagkakaisa Laban sa Karahasan

We stand with you in heart and strength. We will never forget.”

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