

A coalition of Asian-Americans came together Thursday at the Southeast Asian Vicariate to condemn state Ballot Measure 9, calling it a reminder of more repressive times.

June Arima Schumann said the anti-gay measure reminded her of the forced internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. "We felt very lonely and isolated. Today, we do not want to be silent."

A different war but a similar perspective brought Paul Kinh Duong, city of Portland refugee coordinator, to the Thursday rally.

"We are all too aware of the dangers that can come to individuals who are deemed 'guilty' of wrong beliefs or behavior," said Duong, a former Vietnamese army officer who fled after his country fell to communists.

The measure would prohibit the state from establishing civil rights protections based on sexual orientation and require the state to discourage homosexuality.

Representatives of a group called the Asian Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays also spoke Thursday.

Member Lynn Nakamoto, a lesbian, said the Japanese American community in Oregon was quick to respond to her concerns about Measure 9, never giving her sexual preference a second thought.

Nationally, the Japanese-American Citizens League, formed in 1929, has been alerted by Democratic congressmen Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui to speak out against Measure 9 in Oregon, she said.

Another member, Harvey Lau, said the sting of racial slurs he receives is no different from pain he feels about anti-gay epithets. But only discrimination against his appearance is against the law, he said.

Nady Tan, executive director of the International Refugee Center of Oregon, said he and his staff believe Measure 9 a "particularly reprehensible approach to divide the citizens of Oregon and to promote bigotry."

Immigrants are often escaping political or religious persecution, Tan said, and Measure 9 recreates that divisiveness as they try and make a difficult adjustment to life in the United States.

Jim Choi of the Korean Grocers Association said all 250 members throughout the greater Portland area oppose the ballot measure which, he said, "opens the door to hate crimes."

The Vicariate's Father Vincent Minh, spiritual leader of the Vietnamese Catholic community who said in an interview he supports the position of Archbishop William Levada, also opposes Measure 9.

The No on 9 campaign has stressed the civil rights questions raised by Measure 9.

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