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Dear friends,

My name is Francisco Ramos and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European and Latino immigrants of Illinois (CAAELII), a collaborative of forty (40) immigrant based organizations operating to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees in the Chicago metropolitan area.

I have been involved in housing issues since year 2001, when I became the Executive Director of the Rogers Park Community Action Network (RPCAN), a tenants rights organization located in the Rogers Park community area in Chicago. From 2002 to 2005 I was the Fair Housing Advocate for the Latino and immigrant communities at the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities (LCMOC), a fair housing organization founded in 1966, after the historical visit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Chicago.

I have developed and implemented housing advocacy training programs using what it is known as Peer-to-Peer and Train-the-Trainer methodology, empowering members of local communities to discover and understand the legal resources available to protect their rights, and to lead their neighbors, friends and acquaintances to these resources when they need to use them.

I have seen over and over again immigrants and refugees being discriminated in housing private markets, both in the city of Chicago and in the surrounding suburbs, and I have seen their standard of living negatively impacted because of that. I have seen immigrant and refugee children and youth not being able to access well financed school districts, for instance, and being forced to attend underfunded schools plagued with street violence and neglect.

I have seen the suburban housing syndrome of steering immigrants and refugees into huge apartment rental projects with hundreds of units. I have helped tenants in such suburbs be trained and organized to try to obtain simple repairs for their units, facing threats of having the police called on them or worse, if they try to exercise the rights granted to them by local ordinances.

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**ACTIVE MEMBERS:** Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment, Arab American Action Network, Association of Street Vendors, Bosnian Herzegovinian American Community Center, Cambodian Association of Illinois, Casa de la Cultura Guatemalteca, Centro Romero, Centro Sin Fronteras, Chicago Community and Workers Rights, Chicago Workers' Collaborative, Chicagoland Nepali Friendship Society, Chinese American Service League, Chinese Mutual Aid Association, Colombia Vive, Erie Neighborhood House, Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago, Fashion Revolution, Guatemalan Cultural Community Organization, Hanul Family Alliance, Health Advocacy Project of Little Village, Heartland Alliance, Indo-American Center, Illinois Association of Community Health Promoters and Community Health Workers (*formerly known as The PRO.ME.SA. Coalition*), Instituto del Progreso Latino, Korean American Community Services, Korean American Resource & Cultural Center, Lao American Community Services, Latino Organization of the Southwest, Latinos Progresando, Midwest Asian American Center, Muslim Women Resource Center, Nepalese American Society, Restaurant Opportunity Center (ROC Chicago), Southwest Youth Collaborative, United African Organization, Vietnamese Association of Illinois, Women for Economic Justice. **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:** Genesis Center, Pilsen Community Church, Cooperativa "Niño Feliz"

I have seen the discriminatory practices that Back Stretch immigrant workers laboring at the Arlington Heights Racetrack face every day in a gated community heavily controlled by management. I have been questioned by guards at the entry posts of the Arlington Heights Racetrack when trying to enter to simply talk to workers. I witnessed the actions of the Arlington Heights Racetrack against the Rev. Dave Krueckeberg, an ordained Minister of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, to force him out of his ministry at the racetrack because he was listening to workers as they talked to him about the subhuman housing conditions imposed on them day after day.

I have witnessed the brutal displacement of African American families by the building of the new United Center, and I have witnessed a thriving community being displaced to give way to parking lots. To this day I can still see churches surrounded by parking lot fences, in a desperate struggle for survival, along Damen Avenue between Madison and Jackson avenues here in Chicago.

I have witnessed the displacement of low-income families in West Town, where I owned a home for several years starting in 1993, and I sat in the City of Chicago Housing Court with all my elderly neighbors from the 1500 block of West Augusta Boulevard in the mid 1990's as three inspectors from the City of Chicago came house by house and left behind long lists of violations to the municipal code behind them. I remember looking at my own list of violations and estimating that more than \$15,000 would be needed to comply with the municipal code. I remember wondering whether or not those inspections were a selective implementation of the municipal code in an attempt to push vulnerable families out of Chicago to give way for upscale condominium developments.

I have also witnessed patterns of discrimination that African Americans, immigrants and refugees, and working class families face from governmental entities as they try to displace them from within their geographical limits. I have witnessed the plans developed by the City of Chicago to build a convention center with the probability of bringing the Olympic Games in 2016, and in this manner displace hundreds of low-income families in South Chicago, the East side and surrounding communities.

I have participated in negotiations with representatives from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on behalf of Mexicans home owners who had a claim against the Village of Franklin Park as they thought the village was trying to move them out of their homes on Manheim Road and Schiller Avenue through harassment and intimidation.

I helped train community residents in the city of Rockford as they were preparing to defend themselves against the plans that the major had in 2003 and 2004 to bring the casino to Rockford and to build an entertainment park right in the heart of what was the Mexican and African American community on Main Street South of the Rockford Metro Centre. Fortunately, the Major was elected out of office and the problem rested for a while, but I would not be surprised if it is back again.

My list goes on and on, but I just want to share with you that it is evident to me that the most basic Human Rights to housing, as stated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which I hold here in my hand, are being violated in this Chicago metropolitan area we call home. It is evident to me that low-income families of all ethnicities need to become more and more familiar with the letter and the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to force our local, regional, state and national governments to be accountable by using international Human Rights courts if the willingness to solve matters is not there.

I thank you for your time and for the space that has been provided for me to share my expertise in this public forum.

Best wishes to your work,

Francisco Ramos  
Executive Director