



KOREAN RESOURCE CENTER

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January 25, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The Korean Resource Center (KRC) is honored and proud to support the nomination of the late Colonel Young Oak Kim for the 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom. His heroic service in the United States Army and his pioneering leadership in underserved communities deem him a meritorious American citizen.

Founded in 1983 by low-income, young immigrants, KRC's mission is to empower the Korean American community of the greater Los Angeles area through education, social service, community organizing, advocacy, civic engagement and culture. KRC's programs and campaigns engage over 11,000 community members annually, targeting the most vulnerable members including the low-income, recent immigrant, limited English proficient, undocumented, seniors and youth.

Born in 1919 to immigrant parents, Colonel Young Oak Kim was a valiant Korean American war hero served in the United States Army during World War II and the Korean War. During World War II, Kim served as the only Korean American in the famous Japanese American unit, the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team. The Army offered him a transfer due to fears of ethnic conflict, but he refused, declaring, "There is no Japanese or Korean here. We're all Americans and we're fighting for the same cause." This sentiment underscored Kim's character, having the valor of a warrior with a heart of benevolence.

Throughout his military career, Young Oak Kim earned several awards, including the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross, but he remained a humble global citizen. The Korean War was the first time Kim had been in Korea, and he felt the need to give back to his origins. While serving in Seoul, he led his battalion in adopting an orphanage of over 500 children, who grew up to be successful innovators and leaders in the workforce.

After his retirement from an exemplary military career in 1972, Kim dedicated his life to serving minorities, youth, and the poor in his native Southern California. He was active in working with Special Services for Groups, a non-profit service organization that promoted equal opportunities for vulnerable minorities. He became a founding member of numerous non-profit organizations in the region, including the Korean American Museum; the Korean American Coalition; and the Korean Health, Education, Information and Research Center. When he was on the board of the United Way Los Angeles Chapter, he added the organization's programs for the Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese,



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and Korean American communities. Kim was also chairman of the Center for Asian Pacific Families, which, under his leadership, became the largest women's shelter in Southern California in the 1990's. He was also dedicated to preserving the history of contributions of the Japanese American military units of World War II. He helped to establish the Japanese American National Museum, the Go For Broke Monument, and the Go For Broke Educational Foundation.

With the spirit of Kim's civic and community service work, KRC seeks to build a progressive voice for immigrants and communities of color within the larger social justice movement. Given the characteristics of the Korean American population, empowerment can be effectively achieved through a holistic approach that addresses the multiple and human needs of our community. **Social service** provides needed assistance and attracts the general public to our education and organizing work; **Education** helps individuals develop a critical analysis; **Culture** roots us as communities of color and immigrants living in the US; and **Organizing** enables us to equip community members with the tools and capacity to direct & implement our strategies for social change. Finally, **Coalition building** ensures that all communities can move forward together.

Col. Kim passed away in 2005, but his legacy lives on through the lives he saved during his service in the U.S. Army and the impact his organizations continue to make on new generations of Americans striving to fulfill their American dream. At KRC, we recognize Kim's pioneering leadership and value the altruism, courage, and commitment to equality that life's work exemplified, particularly for underserved communities. Because of his exemplary contributions to our nation, Young Oak Kim is a worthy candidate for the highest civilian award in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Respectfully,

Dae Joong Yoon
President

Julie Kurumada
Board Chair