

Advocacy groups put spotlight on racial profiling

By Dana Gleeson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO (NNPA) - A 62-year old African-American male living in Chicago says he has been "street profiled" at least 12 times by police officers in his Bronzeville neighborhood. The most recent incident included an alleged false arrest for drug possession.

In the suburb of Bensenville, a taxi driver believes he was "post-9/11 profiled" when a police officer contacted the Immigration and Naturalization Service to check his status during a routine traffic stop. The driver was arrested and detained.

And the president of a Muslim American advocacy group was denied re-entry into the United States following a trip to Jordan. His permission was revoked for "security reasons" he feels have not been explained.

These are a small sampling of the stories shared during The Public Truth, a series of hearings on racial profiling of immigrants, refugees and people of color in the U.S.

The Chicago hearings, sponsored by the Applied Research Center, Arab American Action Network, Coalition of African, Asian, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois and Amnesty International, were held recently at New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church and DePaul University.

People of color and immigrants are profiled when their race or ethnicity are used to predict criminal behavior, according to Josina Morita, a research associate at the Applied Research Center. And it "includes practices and policies that result in discrimination," she said.

Profiling comes in many forms and includes stops of people, primarily African-American and Hispanic men, on the street to search for drugs, weapons, gang affiliation or criminal activity.

Today, airport profiling is directed at middle eastern and Muslim travelers, according to Hateem Abudayyeh, executive director of the AAAN. He testified at the hearings: "If you're Arab or Muslim, you're likely to have experienced airport searches simply for 'flying while Arab or Muslim.'"

Prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks, African-American women appeared to be the primary targets of this form of racial profiling, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office report: "Better Targeting of Airline Passengers for Person

Searches Could Produce Better Results."

The report found that U.S. Custom agents stripped searched Black women more than any other group of passengers between 1997 and 1999. And Black women were nine times more likely than White women to be x-rayed on suspicion of drug smuggling and they were less than half as likely to be found carrying contraband.

The most common form of racial profiling occurs when people of color are stopped and searched while driving.

Maryland is known for what are called "driving while Black" practices that result in a large number of African-Americans being stopped in the state. In 1996, data submitted by Maryland State Police to a federal court showed that more than 70 percent of all traffic stops involved African-Americans, who make up only 17 percent of all drivers on Maryland roads.

"Even Judge Timothy Lewis, the chairperson of our hearings, was pulled over by police in Maryland," Nancy Bothne, director, Midwest regional office of Amnesty International, said during her comments at Truth session.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed a bill in July 2002, that will require state and local law enforcement officials record the race of motorists they stop.

The law was sponsored by State Sen. Barak Obama in response to allegations by people of color about being unfairly stopped on the basis of race, according to Audra Wilson, Obama's deputy press and policy director.

"The purpose of this requirement is to counteract racial profiling," Wilson said. "Police will have to be careful about who they stop because they are being monitored."

The law will go into effect January 1, 2004.

A major goal of the Truth hearings was to draw attention to the impact the "war on terror" is having on immigrants and refugees.

Within the past two years, the U.S. government has instituted anti-terrorism policies that include the USA Patriot Act, Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, Absconder Apprehension Initiative, Terrorist Information Prevention System and National Security Entry-Exit Registration System.

These policies, according to an ARC report titled "Re-

asserting Justice," have resulted in indefinite detentions, deportation without legal representation, no-fly lists at airports, secret military tribunals, workplace raids and "special registrations" for boys and men from 25 Arab, Muslim, African and Asian countries.

In February, the Department of Justice proposed the Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003 or Patriot Act II.

Its opponents, including the American Civil Liberties Union, say its most severe problems are that it strips native-born Americans of all citizenship rights if labeled a terrorist, grants access to genetic information without a

court order or personal consent, and places restrictions on protests and civil disobedience.

Before the September 11 terrorist attacks, 60 percent of Americans believed it was wrong to use race as a predictor of criminal behavior and felt the practice should be stopped, according to David Harris, author of "Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work."

Now that view has changed, he said, with a majority of people believing that it's okay to profile if it will protect the country.

"We all want to be safe and it's not hard to understand but that does not mean that it [racial profiling of im-

migrants and refugees] is right," he said.

Harris recommends that law enforcement officials concentrate on suspicious behavior rather than focus on appearance. He suggests also that relationships be formed with immigrant and refugee communities as a means of gathering intelligence.

"This is the only way to get all the information needed to target resources in the best possible way. And the only people equipped to give us the intelligence are those who speak the language," he said.

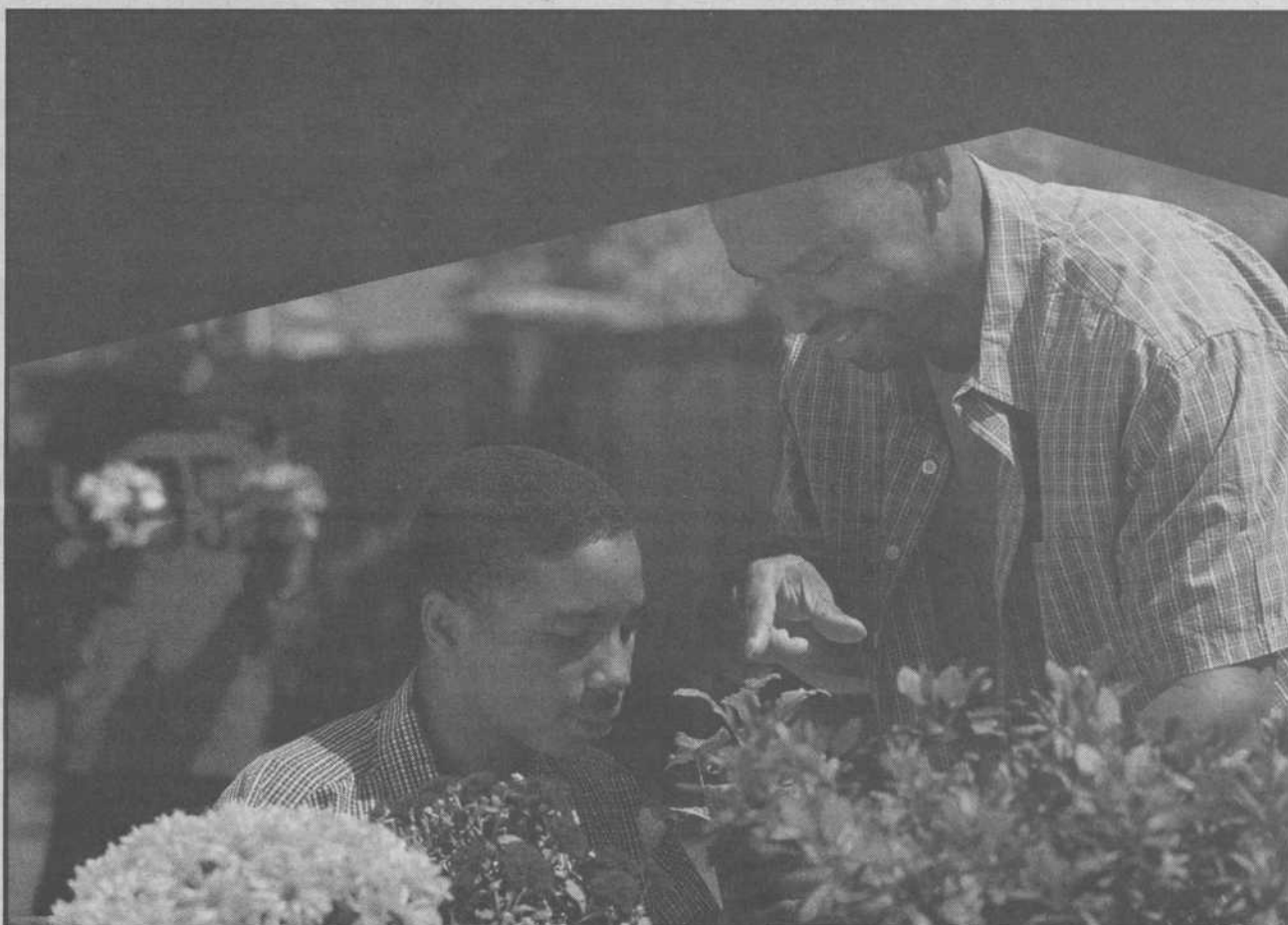
On the national level, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) is part of a bipartisan group of legislators who introduced a bill in October 2003 that

would "amend a number of the troublesome provisions in the USA Patriot Act."

The Security and Freedom Ensured (SAFE) Act, if passed, will place limits on the FBI's seizure of business and library records, "sneak and peek" warrants and roving wiretaps.

"I believe it is possible to combat terrorism and preserve our individual freedoms at the same time," Durbin said in a statement. "The Patriot Act crossed the line on several key areas of civil liberties, and this legislation restores the necessary checks and balances to the system."

Dana Gleeson writes for Chicago Standard Newspapers.



At home with Family.

Turning work into play. Connecting on a different level just by changing scenery. Hanging out 'til dark. Outdoor bliss. Home! Over three generations of homeowners have trusted American Family Insurance for the sound advice and committed service that helps them live life to the fullest. Give us a call or visit www.amfam.com today. Discover the peace of mind of knowing Family's always at home protecting what matters most to you. American Family Insurance.

Check your local telephone directory for the agent nearest you.



American Family Mutual Insurance Company and its Subsidiaries
Home Office - Madison, Wisconsin 53783
www.amfam.com

AD-000416
©2003



All your protection under one roof