

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION TOOLKIT ON DOCUMENTED INCIDENTS OF
XENOPHOBIA AND INTOLERANCE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

PART III: TIPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESPONDING TO XENOPHOBIC RHETORIC
[JANUARY 2008 UPDATE]

Xenophobia, racism, and intolerance have no place in political and civic discourse. Yet, a pattern of such rhetoric continues to exist in America's political environment. When xenophobia and racism permeate the political sphere, there can be far-reaching consequences. Xenophobic rhetoric made by political and public figures can foster similar sentiments on the part of the public, and perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes. It can also influence support for policies and practices that target or harm people of color and immigrants. And it can further feelings of marginalization and hamper political and civic participation on the part of immigrants and communities of color.

For decades, African Americans and Latinos have been subjected to racist rhetoric in the political sphere. More recently, South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs and Arab Americans have been the targets of xenophobic and intolerant rhetoric. In addition, candidates of South Asian descent have also reported encountering xenophobic and intolerant comments by their opponents.

Since August 2006, SAALT has been gathering, analyzing, and publicizing instances of intolerant rhetoric in the political spectrum. This 3-part toolkit includes: (1) Documented examples of such rhetoric, aimed generally at South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh communities as a whole; (2) Documented examples of such rhetoric aimed specifically at South Asian candidates running for elected office; and (3) Tips for community members on how to respond to such rhetoric. SAALT updates sections of the toolkit periodically, and alerts community members, the media, and elected officials when xenophobic rhetoric begins to increase. As the 2008 election cycle approaches, SAALT is being even more vigilant about monitoring intolerant rhetoric in the political sphere. This section, the third part of the toolkit, focuses on *how community members can take action and respond to xenophobic comments made in political discourse*. To obtain the other sections of the toolkit, please visit the SAALT website at www.saalt.org or contact SAALT at saalt@saalt.org.

SAALT is a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to fostering civic and political participation by South Asians through a social justice framework that combines advocacy, community education, coalition-building, and leadership development.

It is important to note that the examples contained in this document are intended to provide only a snapshot of the types of intolerant rhetoric that exists in political discourse. We encourage community members to assist with this documentation process by sending us examples of similar rhetoric in the political sphere to saalt@saalt.org. SAALT will use this document to advocate for a more effective response from political parties regarding xenophobic rhetoric in the political sphere.

SAALT acknowledges the input of community members who have helped to shape this document. We especially thank Rishi Agarwal (Illinois) and Nitasha Sawhney (California); Anil Kalhan (New York); interns Pooja Merai (Illinois) and Neha Singhal (Maryland); and our Board of Directors and Council of Advisors.

REACTING AND RESPONDING – TIPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

There are a variety of responses that community members can take to respond to the prevalence of xenophobic and insensitive rhetoric in the political environment. Below are some suggestions for community members and groups.

Track, Monitor, and Report Incidents

- Community members should track and monitor incidents of xenophobia and racism made by elected officials or those running for office. Tracking such incidents can be done through searches of local print media, both in community as well as mainstream press, and by becoming actively involved in local elections.
- Report such incidents to political parties, and to organizations such as SAALT. We are interested in maintaining an archive of xenophobic statements in the political context; please send us an email with a description of the incident and a citation, if possible, to saalt@saalt.org.

Respond to Intolerant Rhetoric

Responding to xenophobic rhetoric in the political sphere can take on a variety of forms, depending on the nature of the comments.

- Articulate the impact of xenophobic or intolerant rhetoric. Here are some talking points:
 - *Xenophobic rhetoric can marginalize and alienate community members.*
 - *Public figures and elected officials often set the tone for the public. When public figures make xenophobic or intolerant comments, members of the public can form negative perceptions about certain communities as well.*
 - *Statements about policy stances are commonplace among elected officials and candidates for office. However, these statements can become problematic when they include inflammatory language to shore up support for policies that single out communities.*
 - *Xenophobic rhetoric can chill civic and political participation on the part of community members who are targeted or marginalized.*
- Examples of potential responses to xenophobic rhetoric include:
 - *Seeking a clarification from the official making the comment*
 - *Demanding an apology*
 - *Asking political parties to make public statements regarding the comments*
 - *Informing ethnic and mainstream media of statements and comments locally*
 - *Writing an op-ed or letter to the editor*
 - *Exercising political power - for example, one of the consequences of Senator Allen's statements calling the South Asian campaign worker of his opponent a "macaca" was an apparent decrease in public support to his campaign and an increase in that of his opponent's*

Engage in Civic and Political Involvement

Greater civic and political participation by community members in America can make a difference in the political environment. Examples of such participation include:

- *Becoming familiar with the stances on issues affecting our community that are taken by elected officials*
- *Ensuring that elected officials who use xenophobia and racism to advocate for policies that endanger the rights of immigrants and people of color do not resort to such tactics*
- *Understanding and communicating our opinions on policy issues to elected officials*
- *Making sure that elected officials are accountable to our community*