

New rights panel to look at post-9;

11 detainees;

Ethnic groups and lawyers will examine the cases of immigrants detained in Pa. during the last year.

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Body

A **new** civil-**rights** coalition, created by an unusual array of **ethnic-group** activists and **lawyers**, said it planned to **examine cases** of **immigrants detained** in **Pennsylvania** in the **last year**.

Assembled in recent weeks, the Philadelphia-based Coalition for the Defense of Civil Liberties said it had yet to identify whether there were grounds for civil-**rights** lawsuits. But organizers said a joint effort was needed to **look** at allegations since Sept. **11**, particularly involving Middle Eastern and South Asian nationals, and to be a watchdog for possible future violations.

"We're also in the process of creating a forum to explore the ramifications of everything that has happened," said Stefan Presser, legal director of the ACLU of **Pennsylvania**, who helped create the coalition. "While the Bush administration keeps saying it is taking steps to protect us, we think there are profound ramifications for American citizens."

Last Friday, a U.S. District Court judge ruled that the administration improperly withheld the identities of more than 1,000 **detainees** in its antiterrorism campaign and ordered it to release the names by mid-August. The administration has countered that publicizing the names would hinder its terrorism investigation.

Most of the **detainees** have been released, the administration has said. Some have reported that they were held for months, charged only with relatively minor immigration violations. None has been charged with a crime related to the Sept. **11** attacks.

An unknown number were held at the regional INS **detention** center in York, **Pa.**, including at least one Egyptian man who said he was held in solitary confinement for more than a month without being charged.

Coalition members so far include leading members of 13 advocacy **groups**, including the Hispanic Bar Association, the Muslim Bar Association, the Nationalities Services Center, and even the German Society of **Pennsylvania**. It

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includes representatives from the Philadelphia Police Advisory Commission and the Police-Barrio Relations Project. It was spearheaded by the Philadelphia Arab-American Association.

"I definitely think there is a need to focus on additional work in civil liberties, especially on the idea that this doesn't just affect one group," said Judi Bernstein-Baker, a participant and executive director of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society and Council Migration Service, which is funded largely by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia.

Hiro Nishikawa, Philadelphia-area director of the Japanese American Citizens League, said vigilance was necessary to prevent a repeat of the WWII-era internment of Japanese, German and Italian Americans.

"It's only in this way that the public can understand the hazards of essentially giving carte blanche to the Justice Department to investigate anybody they want," said Nishikawa, who was imprisoned as a child.

Presser, of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the coalition would start by assembling names of Philadelphia-area lawyers willing to take cases for free. The group is also planning fact-finding trips to the INS facility in York.

The goal will be filing civil-rights cases or exposing questionable activities through public forums or the media.

Most of the work will be voluntary; none of the participating groups has been asked for money.

"We can only do it if we work together," said Marwan Kreidie, director of the Arab-American Association. "Precisely because we're the targeted group, we cannot go at this alone."

Several participants conceded the difficulty in finding a correct balance between antiterrorism measures and civil-liberties enforcement.

But "there has to be a line between civil liberties and national defense," said Anne O'Callaghan, executive director of the Philadelphia Area Immigration Resource Center, created in 1998 to help Irish immigrants and now partly funded by the Irish government.

Bernard Freitag, president of the German Society of Pennsylvania, said that "the first goal is to intervene on behalf of people who are innocent."

Representatives also attended from the Kensington South Community association, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Association of Community Development Associations.

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