

Korean American leaders address rights panel

By Kay Hwangbo
Korea Times

A meeting between Korean leaders and a visiting U.S. Civil Rights Commission delegation on May 10 became briefly contentious when a black official said Asians may have an edge over blacks in benefiting from bank loans and government programs.

The comment by commission Chairman Arthur H. Fletcher drew a blunt response from community leader H. Cooke Sundo:

"If you think that's true as a starting point, then we have a problem."

Commissioner William Allen defused the situation by saying, "We have held many forums where we took testimony from Asians about banking and business-financing practices. We know that there is not necessarily a favored position for Asians."

Fletcher, for his part, cited a Wall Street Journal article that indicated that it is more difficult for blacks than whites to borrow money.

"I'm accusing the financial institutions for following these practices, not Koreans," he said.

The commissioners were in Koreatown to tour damaged areas and get advice on how to structure a future hearing's agenda and who from the Korean American community should be invited to speak at the hearing. Fletcher said. Vice Chairman Charles Pei Wang and staff director Wilfredo Gonzalez also attended the meeting.

The Los Angeles hearing will be in December or January, the commissioners said.

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But Jackie Young, a state representative from Hawaii, said that is too late.

"You have to take action now, not in December," she said, pointing out that the commission can grab the media spotlight in the immediate aftermath of the riots, and while candidates are trying to get votes.

Other leaders told the commission that the mainstream media has been fueling racial tensions, that Korean Americans took a "beating" during the riots and police did not respond to Koreans' cries for help.

"We urge you to tell the Los Angeles Times and television stations to be fair," said Kapson Yim Lee, editorial board member of the Korea Times.

Chris Pak, a member of the Korean American Coalition, said Koreans' civil rights will be violated if a proposed Los Angeles planning ordinance is passed. The ordinance would exclude burned liquor stores, swap meets, auto repair shops and pawn shops from being rebuilt under an expedited approval process.

Pak asked if the commission could influence the process in some way, on behalf of Koreans.

Fletcher said he did not have the information to decide right away, but added that he could issue a press release or bring up the matter with Mayor Tom Bradley and Los Angeles Times editors, with whom he was scheduled to meet. He did not say whether he would do so.