



Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office Asian American & Pacific Islander Advisory Board

Chanchanit Martorell

Board Member

Born in Thailand and raised in Los Angeles, Martorell studied political science and public law at UCLA where she received her B.A. and her M.A. in Urban Planning with a specialization in Urban Regional Development/Third World Development. She also studied Humanities at Chiang Mai University in Northern Thailand in 1988. Engaged in social activism for the past 35 years, Martorell is currently the Executive Director of the Thai Community Development Center, a non-profit organization she founded in 1994 in an effort to improve the lives of Thai immigrants through services that promote cultural adjustment and economic self-sufficiency. Her experiences leading to the founding of Thai CDC include work as a planner, as an aide to Congressman Mel Levine and work with other local and state legislative offices. She also created and taught the first Thai American Experience course offered as part of UCLA's Asian-American Studies curriculum in 1992.

During Thailand's military coup of 1992, she mobilized the Thai community in Southern California to protest the atrocities committed by the military junta against civilian demonstrators in Bangkok, demanding a peaceful return to democracy for Thailand and its people. After the Los Angeles Civil Unrest in 1992, she co-authored the Mid-City Plan for the Coalition of Neighborhood Developers which sought to address the lack of economic resources in an inner-city area of Los Angeles. The pivotal event also led her to documenting the demographics and social and human service needs of Thais in Los Angeles for the first time in a landmark community needs assessment study as a way to advocate for more resources in underserved communities.

She has written on the topics of ethnic competency, the Thai immigrant community, Asian poverty, community economic development, urban revitalization strategies, human trafficking, and global capitalism.

She is known most notably for her work on over a half dozen major human rights cases involving over 2,000 Thai victims of human trafficking who were discovered working in conditions of slavery in the United States. Her tireless advocacy on behalf of the victims and the success of each case has made her a leading expert and sought-after spokesperson on the serious issue of modern-day slavery. She taught a course entitled "Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery" at the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures.



Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office Asian American & Pacific Islander Advisory Board

Because of her deep commitment to creating positive change, she has also become a leading practitioner in the field of community development engaged in ongoing affordable housing development, small business promotion and neighborhood revitalization projects. Two of the projects undertaken by Thai CDC under Martorell's leadership include the development of affordable housing through the rehabilitation of one of Hollywood's historical edifices, the Halifax Apartments, and the development of Palm Village, an affordable senior housing project in Sun Valley.

In 1999, under her leadership, Thai CDC played a pivotal role in the eight-year long community organizing campaign which raised community consciousness and led to the designation of the first Thai Town in the nation right here in East Hollywood. The designation of Thai Town allowed the community to define itself and its place in history. For Martorell, the designation of Thai Town was the first step of a multi-faceted, economic development strategy to revitalize a depressed section of Hollywood while enriching the City's cultural and social fiber.

Dedicated to social and economic justice, she actively serves in a variety of capacities in a number of community/immigrant/labor rights organizations with local, national and global concerns.