

**Physical address:**

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## **STATEMENT FROM RAI BOARD**

January 21, 2026

The Board of Directors of Refugee Artisan Initiative has found it necessary to communicate in more detail about our recent leadership change.

The Board deeply respects and appreciates Ming-Ming Tung Edelman's role in founding and growing RAI. The process that led to a change in Ming-Ming's role with the organization began from a place of deep respect and gratitude for the impact she has had on the organization.

Like most organizations, RAI does not typically disclose Human Resources complaints or details of personnel matters. Such a policy exists to protect both employees who come forward and the individual who is the subject of the concerns, in this case Ming-Ming. That policy necessarily limits what the Board shares publicly, even when misinformation circulates. This confidentiality is not a cover-up.

However, the Board understands why the recent announcement is difficult. Founders are often the heart of the organization. The necessary, recent actions are not a rejection of Ming-Ming's contributions. They are an effort to protect RAI, our staff and artisans, and Ming-Ming herself, while honoring the values on which RAI was founded. The board has a responsibility to ensure a safe and healthy work environment, especially given our mission to create community and a safe and empowering space for refugee women, many of whom have experienced trauma, displacement, or repression.

### **History**

Over several years, multiple staff members reported concerns related to Ming-Ming's conduct and behavior towards them. During this time, the Board worked extensively to support Ming-Ming as Executive Director while addressing these serious internal concerns.

More recently, despite these efforts, the Board received a formal complaint from an employee. The Board hired an experienced and respected local HR consulting firm to investigate the allegations. The firm assigned an investigator from their team who did not know Ming-Ming, the Board, or any staff members, to conduct the interviews. The formal investigation was designed to be fair, independent and respectful to all involved—including Ming-Ming.

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Although the investigation determined that Ming-Ming did not violate federal, state, or local laws, the investigator recommended, based on their findings, that Ming-Ming not be returned to a position where she had supervisory authority over RAI staff.

**A New Role**

As a result, the Board crafted a new role for Ming-Ming that would allow her to continue her work with RAI, but without an internal supervisory role. This new structure would allow Ming-Ming, as Founder, to continue to excel at community engagement, promotion of RAI and fundraising. Her compensation and benefits would remain the same.

The Board first offered this modified role to Ming-Ming in early November 2025, and she refused to accept it. Although Ming-Ming apparently told many outsiders that she was fired, she was not. Ming-Ming remained on full pay and benefits.

The Board continued to seek resolution and set Ming-Ming up for success. After extensive efforts by facilitators, advisors and others, and a unanimous vote by the Board, Ming-Ming was presented with, and agreed to, the revised role with her title of Executive Director and Founder, but without supervisory duties.

However, when the understanding was presented as an employment agreement, Ming-Ming refused to accept a role that did not include staff supervision and authority. As it was Ming-Ming's decision to not sign the employment agreement for the modified role, the Board concluded that she had voluntarily ended her relationship with RAI. This occurred on January 15, 2026.

Until then, at every stage, the Board sought a path that allowed Ming-Ming to remain with RAI.

**Board of Directors**

The current RAI Board consists of eight women who connected with Ming-Ming across many dimensions—as community advocates, longtime friends, immigrants, members of the Asian community, a family member and even hikers. Five members identify as Taiwanese, Japanese, Filipino or Iranian. One member is a former foster child, and one is a family member of Ming-Ming's. Another spent years working in developing countries.

All Board members serve as volunteers. Collectively, they bring decades of experience in nonprofit organizations as volunteers and Board members. These relationships and experiences underscore

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that the Board's actions arose from expertise, trust and a shared commitment to RAI's future. The united decision reflects the Board's professionalism, integrity and care throughout this process.

**Loss of Trust**

Unfortunately, during these past few months, the Board experienced a loss of trust – not in Ming-Ming's dedication to our mission – but in her ability to operate within the governance and accountability structures required of an Executive Director and employee.

While still serving as a paid executive Ming-Ming engaged in actions that undermined RAI, disrupted organizational stability and eroded trust. Some examples include:

- Public statements as early as November indicating she had been fired.
- Statements that did not accurately reflect the facts or the context of the HR investigation.
- Untrue allegations of racism and claims of a hostile takeover by the Board.
- Contacting staff and artisans with disparaging statements about the Board and suggestions that staff may lose their jobs.
- Attempting to download all RAI data files, included highly confidential and private information about employees, donors and vendors.
- Sharing Board members' personal contact information publicly.
- Contacting donors and providing inaccurate information that would impact the donors' decisions to continue to contribute.
- Contacting city and state officials and members of the media with inaccurate information.

**Moving Forward – the Mission**

The Board is focused on how we can support the organization's mission and is engaged in hiring an Executive Director to lead the team. RAI is writing its next chapter, including the completion of our newly renovated location in Lake City. The RAI MakerSpace will allow us to expand our support of women refugees, divert more materials from landfills, and continue to provide workforce development training for the many artisans whose determination and courage inspire us.

We want to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude for the support, partnership and collaboration of the RAI community, state and local government officials and organizations, our donors and friends. None of RAI's work would be possible without you.

If you have any further questions, please contact [info@refugeesarts.org](mailto:info@refugeesarts.org) or [board@refugeesarts.org](mailto:board@refugeesarts.org).