

Chief Judge Dora L. Irizarry
Introductory Remarks for Constitution Day
September 16, 2016 – 11:00am

It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome all of you to this Special Session of the Court in celebration of Constitution Day. We have a number of special guests who have joined us in this celebration. For fear that I may miss mentioning anyone, I will not go through all their names, but I do want to extend a warm welcome to our keynote speaker, one of the stars of the super hit Broadway musical, Mr. Okieriete Onaodowan, and Ms. Diane Gujarati who just this week was nominated by President Obama to become a District Judge in this Court. If confirmed, she would be the first district judge of South Asian descent in this district. Welcome to both of you, and Ms. Gujarati we are looking to your speedy confirmation.

As world events have unfolded over the course of the past decade and a half, this entire week has gained a new significance

in our history as a nation. We began this week on Sunday, September 11th, remembering the terrible events of that fateful day, 15 years ago, that changed the world as we knew it. The terror attacks on our nation that resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 innocents impacted not just the United States, but the entire world. I hope that, as we remembered the horrible events of that day, we also focused on the courageous and selfless acts of compassion and love to save lives and comfort the grieving not only by first responders: firefighters, police officers, court officers, and emergency medical personnel, but also by just regular people. That dark day also brought out the very best of the human spirit and inspired all Americans to insure that our system of government would not be destroyed. The new Freedom Tower stands as a symbol of our resilience as a nation as well as the strength of our collective belief in the rule of law,

and the Constitution that embodies the rights and freedoms we hold so dear.

We end this historic week on a brighter, happier note with Constitution Day, also known as Citizenship Day, which actually falls on September 17, to recognize both the signing of the Constitution and, in the words of the enacting statute, “all who, by coming of age or by naturalization, have become citizens.” 36 U.S.C. § 106(b). Most of us think of the 4th of July, the day the Declaration of Independence was signed, as the birthday of the United States, but our true birthday is September 17, 1787, the date the Constitution was signed. While it certainly is fitting that we celebrate the signing of that great document, the Declaration of Independence, the seed that grew into our nation, it is the Constitution that nurtured that seed and helped it grow into a nation that prides itself in the rule of law, equal protection under the law, and due process of law.

Perhaps there is no better symbol of the enduring impact, viability and promise of our Constitution and all it embodies, than our naturalization ceremonies. In this district, we naturalize 50,000 to 65,000 people annually, the second highest number in the nation after the Central District of California, but we have the most ceremonies of any district, about 310 per year. We are also probably the most diverse district in terms of countries represented. The men and women who will become citizens today and the thousands who are naturalized every year have given up everything—their countries, families, and homes—many coming with nothing more than the clothes on their backs to pursue their hopes and dreams for a better future in the land of freedom. That is the promise of America. In this country, if you dream big and work hard, you can achieve your heart's desire. It is the hard work, hope, and faith in this American Dream of immigrants that built this country and made

it great. The Brooklyn Bridge, right outside this Courthouse, was the dream of a German immigrant that was realized through the hard work of other immigrants. Many of the judges of this very Court are either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants. I am a first generation Puerto Rican, and while a citizen by birth, my experience is entirely an immigrant experience. My parents came with nothing, spoke only Spanish and struggled hard for a better life for me and my siblings, and here I stand, a Chief Judge of this Court. Judge Margo Brodie, whose picture and life summary is right outside this courtroom, was born in the West Indies and became a citizen in this very courtroom. Indeed, Constitution Day is being marked this week by special naturalization ceremonies held throughout the country. To commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the creation of the National Parks Service, some of these ceremonies are being held in national treasures like Ellis Island, where the

Second Circuit is holding its ceremony today, and Sagamore Hill where the EDNY Judges of Central Islip will hold a ceremony.

Today's Constitution Day celebration also is part of a Circuit-wide federal courts civic engagement initiative launched last year by Second Circuit Chief Judge Robert Katzmann to increase the public's understanding of the role and operations of the Courts and bring the Courts closer to the community. For many years, this Court has been actively involved in outreach efforts for community engagement, and in encouraging, developing, and supporting civic education programs, particularly for students at all levels. Today, in addition to our new citizens, we have, as our honored guests, students and faculty from William Alexander Middle School 51 in Park Slope and Saint Anselm Catholic Academy in Bay Ridge who will assist us with the program. (Give them a hand.)

The Judiciary, one of the three branches of government established by the Constitution, is tasked with insuring that the Constitution and laws of the United States are upheld. The Judges of this Court—District, Magistrate, and Bankruptcy—embrace this obligation freely, as both a duty and a privilege. Today, to further honor our Constitution, we celebrate our Magistrate Judges, many of whom also are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. It often is difficult to find something that all district judges of this Court can agree on, but one thing we do agree on unanimously is that we have the best magistrate judges in the nation. These are men and women who have been chosen purely on merit. Among the reasons why we honor them today is because they generally are the first judges the litigants encounter in either civil or criminal cases. On a daily basis, they ensure that many of our fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution are protected. For

example, the magistrate judges consider the applications for search and arrest warrants by law enforcement and make sure that they comply with the requirements of the Fourth Amendment. In criminal cases, they insure that no one's freedom is restricted unreasonably or in violation of the due process mandates of the Fifth Amendment when they make bail determinations. The precious right to a fair trial by an impartial jury of one's peers guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution is enforced by them when they select juries for trials by the district judges. These are among the most basic rights guaranteed by our Constitution that the magistrate judges, on a daily basis, work diligently to defend. And so, we have chosen one of our long serving magistrate judges, the Hon. Marilyn D. Go, to administer the oath to our new citizens.

Appointed on March 10, 1993, Magistrate Judge Marilyn D. Go was the first Asian American woman to serve as a judge

in a federal court. A first generation American of Chinese heritage, Judge Go emigrated with her family from the Philippines to the United States in 1956. She was naturalized on January 12, 1962 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Judge Go graduated *cum laude* from Radcliffe College in 1973 and Harvard Law School in 1977, where she helped establish the Asian American Law Student Association. After graduating, she served as a law clerk to the Honorable William M. Marutani in Philadelphia, who was then the only Asian American judge on the East Coast at the time. She then served as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York. She left the office in 1982 for private practice, later becoming a partner at the firm at Baden Kramer Huffman Brodsky & Go, P.C.

Judge Go has a long standing commitment to promoting diversity and professionalism in the bar. She was a founding member of the Asian American Bar Association of New York and has served on numerous bar committees and professional organizations.

I now present to you Magistrate Judge Go who will administer the oath to our new citizens.