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**“All We Want for Christmas is Safe Homes!” – 90
Elizabeth St. Tenants and Community Organizations
Demand for Basic Building Services and Safe
Construction Work**

*Seniors and Families with Children Are Living in Conditions That Are Hazardous
to Their Health And Safety*

December 10, 2015, New York, NY – After not having heat over Thanksgiving weekend, the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street held a press conference today to demand their landlord, James Fong, consistently provide adequate building services and stop unsafe construction work.

The 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association has been established and working with CAAAV’s Chinatown Tenants Union, Cooper Square Committee, and Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) since 2013. Exactly four months ago (September 10, 2015), four tenants filed a housing court case against Mr. Fong, with the help of Manhattan Legal Services (MLS) and AAFE, to stop hazardous construction work and demand a tenant protection plan and repairs as the landlord has neglected building conditions not only in the common areas, but also inside individual apartments.

“We live as if we were animals while paying our rents and the owner fixes the empty units. These vacant units are fixed as if they were luxury apartments while the rent regulated apartments of those like me and my neighbors are not fixed as the law mandates,” said **Tomas Davila, a 90 Elizabeth St. tenant of over 50 years.**

The Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force (THPT) confirmed the dire living conditions that tenants were facing at 90 Elizabeth Street when they conducted a building-wide sweep in July 2015, resulting in a Stop Work Order and multiple HPD violations. Demanding for more government supervision to ensure tenant safety, tenants and advocates marched to City Hall to support Council Member Reynoso’s two bills for increasing fines for work without permits and the 12 bills advocated by the Stand for Tenant Safety Coalition.

Despite his claims to comply, Mr. Fong has presented tenants with an unfair proposal, which doesn’t address the needs of our tenants to ensure that the repairs are conducted with their safety in mind. Tenants still have many issues such as insufficient heat, garbage disposal, dirty stairways that were covered in dust from the construction work, and exposed electrical wiring.

“Every renter is entitled to live in a safe, clean building with the services guaranteed by law – and being a landlord means undertaking the obligation to provide that,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.** “The conditions that tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street have been forced to

endure are completely unacceptable. I stand with all Manhattan tenants fighting for basic services like heat, and will continue to do whatever I can to hold landlords who fail to meet their obligations accountable."

"For far too long, we have let immoral landlords get away with treating New Yorkers like second class citizens in their own homes," said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. "With groups like STS and CAAAV and tools like the Worst Landlords Watchlist, we are putting these bad landlords on notice and coming through on our promise to hold them accountable for forcing tenants to live in dangerous and unsanitary conditions "

"Construction work is no excuse for poor living conditions," said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. "I join my colleagues, the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenants Association, Asian Americans for Equality, CAAAV, Cooper Square Committee, Urban Justice Center, SNYC and STS coalitions, advocates and community members in pushing for an end to unacceptable practices that are against the law and destroy people's homes."

City Council Member Margaret Chin said, "This is not just a housing issue, it's a human rights issue. For far too long, the tenants of 90 Elizabeth St. have suffered unbearable harassment at the hands not only of their current landlord, but the previous owner who refused to make necessary repairs. These residents have a right to live in peace in their homes without the constant fear of harassment and eviction. My office continues to fight harassment by helping provide free and low-cost legal services, organizing tenants, and pushing legislation to get the City to do more to protect residents. Currently, it is too easy for landlords to buy buildings with the intention of clearing them to make way for market-rate tenants. Together, we can solve our affordability crisis. But we cannot move forward without strong protections that preserve the affordable housing we have and keep people like the tenants of 90 Elizabeth in their homes."

"For far too long unscrupulous landlords throughout New York City have used construction as a means to harass tenants. The coalition Stand for Tenant Safety (STS) is excited to testify in support of Council Member Reynoso's two bills and proud to stand with the tenants of 90 Elizabeth Street on this issue. Int. 0939 and 0940 will increase the fines and penalties for doing work without a permit and for working against a Stop-Work-Order to punish bad landlords like James Fong, the landlord of 90 Elizabeth Street, who conduct aggressive, illegal construction at the expense of tenant safety. The terrible conditions that the tenants at 90 Elizabeth Street are facing demonstrate the urgency of passing all 12 of the STS bills into law this session," said **Stand for Tenant Safety (STS), a coalition of community organizations and tenant advocates**.

Christopher Kui, Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), said, "AAFE is dedicated to stemming the tide of gentrification brought in by owners utilizing illegal construction tactics to displace working families, immigrants and seniors. No matter how long the fight, we are committed to ensuring that harassment tactics by predatory owners have no place in New York City. We are proud of the work we are doing in coalition with other community-based organizations and legal service providers in the Stand for Tenant Safety (STS) Campaign and Stabilizing NYC Coalition."

"CAA AV's Chinatown Tenants Union stands with the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association today. Marolda Properties was the owner in 2013 and they sold the building to James Fong in June 2015 for \$6,500,000 even though the building was assessed at \$572,400. This is representative of predatory equity landlords who target long-standing immigrant, low-income communities for quick capital gains by forcing out rent control and rent stabilized tenants and converting vacant units into

market rate units, often after reckless renovations. We will work endlessly with our communities to stop displacement and predatory equity,” said **Wai Yee Poon, Chinatown Tenants Union Organizer at CAAAV.**