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## **Gulf Coast Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Project US Human Rights Network**

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION & PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Gulf Coast Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Project, the monitoring mechanism of the “Hold the US Accountable: The US Human Rights Network’s Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Human Rights Campaign,” is to ensure the protection and observance of human rights by State and non-State actors during times of natural disasters and emergencies and during the return, resettlement, reintegration and reconstruction post-disaster phase. The project and the broader campaign are inherently important to broadening the scope and deepening our commitment to advancing the domestic human rights struggle in the United States. The massive forced migration of populations and displacement as a consequence of natural disasters requires an institutional and organizational response that centers human rights at the core of any humanitarian relief and recovery effort.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objectives of the Monitoring and Documentation Project are to collect relevant data and monitor, evaluate, analyze, and report human rights violations in the Gulf Coast region in the midst of what may become perpetual natural disasters to guarantee that State and non-State actors protect human rights and comply with relevant human rights treaties and doctrine, as it concerns natural disasters and the rights of the displaced.

### **Preliminary Goals**

1. The USHRN Network, in conjunction with various members and partners, will develop a standard methodology, operating protocols, contract and training exercises to guide the actions and conduct of the monitors and documenters participating in the Network.
2. Recruit and train a network of monitors and documenters based in the Gulf Coast and surrounding states (i.e. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, etc.).

These monitors will act as the foundation for the long-term development and expansion of the Monitoring and Documentation Project.

3. Build a comprehensive interface for the Project on the USHRN website.
4. Seek to conduct a series of trainings on the Guiding Principles for government officials in New Orleans and Louisiana. The Project will seek to engage in corresponding trainings with local, state and federal officials based on the findings produced by the Project.

### **Gustav Monitoring Initiative**

The Gustav Monitoring initiative is the first application of the Gulf Coast Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Project. The initiative will be conducted October 2008 – May 2009. The initiative will be conducted in four fundamental phases (see below).

1. **Preliminary Assessment:** The USHRN network and Gulf Coast member organizations and allies will do a preliminary assessment of the monitoring reports it received via field monitors, allies, and the media between Saturday, August 30<sup>th</sup> and Monday, September 8<sup>th</sup> to compile a preliminary report and issue a Statement of Concern (see below).
2. **Statement of Concern:** This statement will address the systematic violations and departures of human rights and humanitarian protocols committed by the US government in the course of Hurricane Gustav evacuation and return operations. This statement will be disseminated to the various divisions of the US government and the media to encourage a) the adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement framework by all the divisions of the US Government and b) the formal incorporation of the Guiding Principles as the standard for local, state, and federal policies determining operation procedure for natural disasters.
3. **Systematic Documentation:** The USHRN, in partnership with various New Orleans member and partner organizations, will interview between 150 – 300 evacuees in New Orleans to document the human rights violations they experienced in the course of the evacuation and return processes of Hurricane Gustav. The USHRN and related members and partners will train 5 - 10 monitors in New Orleans to conduct these interviews.
4. **Publication and Dissemination:** The USHRN and its partners will compile and analyze the findings of this documentation project in winter 2009. Preliminary findings will be distributed in the spring of 2009, and a comprehensive report in summer 2009. Findings will also be incorporated in the CERD shadow report and disseminated to the local, state, and federal government offices divisions of the US Government, the media, and civil and human rights advocacy communities in the effort to promote the Federal adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

5. **Campaign for Government Adoption:** Based on the findings of the Monitoring and Documentation Project selected government departments will be targeted by the Gulf Coast Advocacy Group and other human rights and social justice allies for adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This approach will be cross-sectional, featuring local (e.g New Orleans City Council), state, and federal (e.g. FEMA, DHS,) departments and agencies.