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**US Human Rights Network Decries Lack of Progress  
for Gulf Coast Hurricane Victims**

Three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, progress in the reconstruction of the region and the return of displaced residents has slowed to a trickle. Today, tens of thousands of displaced Gulf Coast residents are still dispersed throughout the country, and many of those who have returned are underemployed and unable to access health care and other basic services – many are homeless or continue to occupy toxic trailers or other substandard housing due to the drastic decline in available and affordable rental properties.

The neglect and mismanagement by FEMA as well as state and local government agencies that characterized the immediate response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita has continued to the present day, well past the time they should have been properly addressed. Thousands of habitable public housing units have been demolished. Essential social services on which residents depend have yet to be fully restored. Funds targeted for the reconstruction and rebuilding of neighborhoods have been diverted to casinos, ports and other private business interests.

The US Human Rights Network condemns the delay in sufficient improvements for those Gulf Coast residents most hurt by the disaster. “After three years, it seems evident that the failure to restore the rights of displaced residents is as much intentional as accidental,” says USHRN Executive Director Ajamu Baraka.

In its review of U.S. compliance with the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), a United Nations committee recently cited ongoing problems in the Gulf Coast as a major concern, noting “the disparate impact that this natural disaster continues to have on low-income African American residents, many of whom continue to be displaced more than two years after the hurricane.” The U.S. government is similarly in clear violation of the U.N. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which require governments at every level to provide adequate services to families affected by natural disasters and facilitate the right of return of the displaced.

It should be noted that the U.S. has ratified ICERD and used the U.N. Guiding Principles in matters of foreign policy. “Apparently, the Bush administration believes that

international treaties and agreements apply only outside U.S. borders,” Baraka says. “We categorically reject that position.”

The marginalization and disenfranchisement of the affected Gulf Coast residents has been no surprise, given their lack of substantive participation in the reconstruction process. If anything, their voices have been ignored or rejected outright, efforts to save public housing units slated for destruction being a prime example. Consequently, the U.N. committee urged that “every effort is made to ensure genuine consultation and participation of persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina in the design and implementation of all decisions affecting them.”

In coalition with Gulf Coast organizations and advocates working to protect the basic human rights of the affected residents, the US Human Rights Network will continue to shine a spotlight on New Orleans and demand justice for all those residents whose lives have been disrupted. “Keeping the issues alive is part of our objective as we enter the fourth year after the hurricanes,” Baraka says. “Resolving them is our ultimate objective.”

*The US Human Rights Network is a membership based organization of more than 250 U.S.-based organizations and over 1200 individuals working on the full spectrum of human rights issues. For more information, please visit our website: [www.ushrnetwork.org](http://www.ushrnetwork.org)*

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