



CONTACT

Ateqah Khaki or David Lerner, Riptide Communications, 212-260-5000

US HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK SAYS FEDS SHOULD HEED UN EXPERTS' CALL TO HALT PUBLIC HOUSING DEMOLITIONS IN NEW ORLEANS

Statement Comes As Activists and Experts Return from Geneva for U.N. Hearing on U.S. Race Record

February 29, 2008, Atlanta, Georgia – Reacting to yesterday's report by a UN expert calling on the U.S. government to immediately stop evictions and demolitions of public housing in New Orleans, **Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the US Human Rights Network** said, *"The Comments from the UN experts captured the reality of situation in New Orleans. What is happening to low-income families in New Orleans is a national disgrace -- and must stop immediately. Human rights and civil rights organizations across the country welcome and support the United Nations' intervention on this issue."*

There has been criticism of the UN report from some who expressed surprise that the UN would intervene on such an issue. Senator David Vitter (R-LA) stated, *"The United Nations, an organization that has been scrutinized for its exploitation of the poor... has deemed itself a high enough authority to look down its nose at us here in the United State over the public housing debate."* Senator Vitter also characterized the United Nations as a "wasteful international organization" and encouraged the UN to focus on cleaning up its own act rather than commenting on U.S. efforts.

In response, Baraka stated, *"Those who would say that the UN is a 'foreign organization' clearly have not done their homework. The U.S. is a major player within the United Nations – and the UN experts who commented on conditions in New Orleans did so as a result of appeals from U.S. citizens."*

The USHRN urges the U.S. government to heed the call from UN experts, halt ongoing evictions and demolitions of public housing in New Orleans, and take immediate steps to protect the rights of those who continue to feel the effects of Hurricane Katrina, many of whom are African America. The statement was released by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing, Miloon Kohtari, and a UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, just days after over 120 activists associated with the USHRN returned from Geneva to monitor the Bush Administration's compliance under the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), an international treaty signed by the U.S., which carried the force of law in the United States.

While in Geneva, activists and experts affiliated with the USHRN testified before United Nations officials about the reality of racial discrimination in the U.S., including the race related effects of Hurricane Katrina. In their statement to the U.S. government, Kothari and MacDougall address the fact that more than 12,000 people remain homeless in the New Orleans metro area alone; demolition of public housing may lead to the displacement of more than 5,000 more families; federal and local authorities continue to ignore the disparate impacts of Hurricane Katrina, claiming that the discrimination is not intentional; and the government must meaningfully consult and engage with the communities and families affected by the demolitions and redevelopment in order to protect the rights of those people who have been affected, who are mostly African American.

Next week, the Committee that monitors the ICERD will release their review of the U.S. record on racism.

The **US Human Rights Network** was formed to promote US accountability to universal human rights standards by building linkages between organizations and individuals. The Network strives to build a human rights culture in the United States that puts those directly affected by human rights violations, with a special emphasis on grassroots organizations and social movements, in a central leadership role. The Network also works towards connecting the US human rights movement with the broader US social justice movement and human rights movements around the world. To learn more, please visit: <http://www.ushrnetwork.org>