

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Hurricane Katrina Survivor Activists Visit Tsunami-affected Villages in Asia to Learn Community Rebuilding Methods

A delegation of hurricane Katrina and Rita survivors from Mississippi and Louisiana is traveling to visit villages devastated by the 2004 tsunami in Thailand and Indonesia from October 26 – November 9, 2006. The group will also attend a regional conference on people-centered disaster recovery. The trip is part of an on-going exchange between activists in Asia and the United States, who are promoting models for rebuilding based on human rights, community participation and recognition of government responsibility to hurricane survivors as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). IDPs have special protections under international human rights standards and the post-disaster policy guidelines recommended by a number of countries, including the U.S.

“In the affected villages, it has been very important to have the full participation of the community in rebuilding. Community took the initiative to organize and build houses with their own hands, in order to make sure that the survivors were the driving force in tsunami recovery, and not only at the mercy of outside speculators,” says Somsook Boonyabanacha of Community Organizations Development Institute and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR). ACHR is based in Thailand and is helping to coordinate the visit.

The National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH) and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) partnered with ACHR, members of a network of tsunami survivors that spans across Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, to launch this exchange. In June 2006, representatives from ACHR traveled to New Orleans to meet with local organizers in New Orleans East, Holy Cross, Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward. They toured some of the areas most damaged by last year’s hurricanes, screened a video documenting their rebuilding projects and held community meetings. Subsequently, representatives from the New Orleans neighborhoods that hosted the June trip traveled to visit villages in Asia with survivor rebuilding projects in September 2006.

“We saw survivors like us, facing extreme circumstances, who are defending their human right to live with dignity in a decent home and a strong voice in what happens to their community,” says Endesha Juakali, a community organizer from St. Bernard’s Survivors Village in New Orleans, LA. “These lessons are very important for us on the Gulf Coast because we face massive displacement, destruction of our way of life and no respect for our right to return.”

Other partners in the exchange include national human rights and housing advocacy organizations, environmental activists, local religious leaders, service providers, community organizers, documentary filmmakers, and an urban planner.

The Gulf Coast delegation for the October/November visit to Asia expects to bring back practical lessons and strategies to share with their home communities, in addition to building solidarity with other disaster survivors. Following the trip, the delegation will hold a series of community meetings and discussions about their experiences.

(cont’d)

Members of the October 2006 New Orleans Delegation to Thailand/Indonesia:

- 1) Victoria Cintra, Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA)
Biloxi, MS
- 2) Elvis Manuel Cintra Licea, Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA)
Biloxi, MS
- 3) Latosha Brown, Saving Our Selves (SOS)
Biloxi, MS
- 4) Rev. Frederick Fields, Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church
New Orleans, LA
- 5) Rev. Lois Dejean, Gert Town Revival Initiative (GRI)
New Orleans, LA
- 6) Nathalie Walker, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR)
New Orleans, LA
- 7) Sam Jackson, B.W. Cooper Housing Complex
New Orleans, LA
- 8) Geina Elizabeth Taylor, Holy Cross Neighborhood Associate
New Orleans, LA
- 9) Robert Moore, SEI Union
New Orleans, LA
- 10) Sharda Sekaran, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)
New York, NY
- 11) Patrick Markee, urban planner
New York, NY
- 12) Jon Stuyvesant, Rada Film Group
New York, NY

Members of the September 2006 New Orleans Delegation to Thailand/Indonesia:

1. Pam Dashiell, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association
New Orleans, LA
2. Viola Washington, Welfare Rights Organization in Gentilly Neighborhood
New Orleans, LA
3. Endesha Juakali, "Survivors Village," St. Bernard Public Housing Project
New Orleans, LA
4. Father Hongdung Van Lukenguyen (Father Luke), Mary Queen of Vietnam Church
New Orleans, LA

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