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For Immediate Release

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Asian Tsunami Relief Activists Visit New Orleans for Exchange with Hurricane Survivors

New Orleans, LA, June 19, 2006--Representatives from the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), and leaders from Aceh, Indonesia, coastal Thailand and Sri Lanka, working in areas devastated by the December 2004 Tsunami, are visiting New Orleans from June 22-24. They plan to tour areas affected by Hurricane Katrina and meet with local community groups that are rebuilding and defending the human right to housing.

The visit is being coordinated by New Orleans-based National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH), in partnership with the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI), and is hosted by a number of local groups, including Hope House. It initiates what is expected to be an ongoing exchange between community leaders from some of the hardest-hit areas of the Gulf Coast with their counterparts in Asia. A group including residents from the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East will travel to Thailand in late Summer as part of this effort to learn firsthand about what survivors of the tsunami have been doing to rebuild their homes and lives.

“When I saw the kind of work that the Asian Coalition was doing, the parallels were obvious. They are rebuilding homes in the poorest villages with the participation of survivors, in defiance of private speculators and government indifference to their plight,” says Brad Paul, Executive Director of NPACH. “We have so much to learn from them. This exchange is hopeful, compelling and, in some ways, inevitable.”

The destruction from the Asian tsunami wiped out whole villages and left many of the poorest displaced from their homes, communities, and livelihoods. Many of the survivors that teamed up with ACHR received little or no support from their government and were in fact prohibited from rebuilding, in deference to commercial real estate and tourism ventures. Ignoring this forced exclusion, they built a network that provides support for participatory reconstruction, reoccupied their villages and are building thousands of homes on their own terms.

“When people just decide to go back and start putting their housing back together again, as a group and without anybody's permission, that's the kind of spirit that will rebuild these neighborhoods, and get people energized and out of the victim mode,” says Tom Kerr of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

The Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, the New Orleans East Vietnamese community, The Welfare Rights Organization of Gentilly, and public housing residents from the tent city recently set up at the St. Bernard housing complex are among those providing tours for the visitors from Asia on Friday, June 23. Hope House will host an Open House for the group on Saturday, June 24 from 9 A.M. until 1 P.M. The visiting activists will give a short presentation at 11 A.M., detailing their rebuilding efforts and comparing their actions and results with what they see happening in New Orleans. Hope House is located at 916 St. Andrew Street. New Orleans.