

Proposed Resolution to Protect the Human Rights of People Struggling to Return to and Rebuild the Gulf Coast Region in the Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina & Rita

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Whereas, if another world is possible, another United States is necessary and another South is critical;

Whereas, people around the world witnessed the U.S. government's racist treatment of African Americans in the Gulf Region of the southern United States during Hurricane Katrina;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government's approval of a hurricane evacuation plan designed for people who have access to vehicles and resources for lodging away from the Gulf Coast region, which discriminated against African Americans who do not have access to vehicles and resources for lodging;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government placing the lives of African Americans in jeopardy by failing to immediately transport African Americans to safe haven;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government constructing substandard and ineptly designed levees that were breached by a storm surge that flooded 80% of the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included the federal government ignoring the eyewitness accounts of African American hurricane survivors living in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, who heard an explosion at their levee before their homes and neighborhood were inundated with floodwater;

Whereas, this racist treatment included giving law enforcement officers a shoot to kill order that allowed the brutalization, incarceration, and merciless killing of African American hurricane survivors;

Whereas, this racist treatment included law enforcement officers blocking access of mostly African American hurricane survivors to bridges that led to higher and safer ground near the city of New Orleans;

Whereas, this racist treatment included a search and rescue operation that separated African Americans hurricane survivors from family members and brought them far distances without their knowledge or consent;

Whereas, this racist treatment included denying food, water, and shelter to African Americans who were evacuated from the Gulf region;

Whereas, the government continues the injustice to this present day – twenty-two months after Hurricane Katrina – with a privatization scheme that is hostile to the needs and human rights of African American, Vietnamese American, Latino, and poor white people who live in the Gulf Coast region;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs began with providing lucrative contracts to companies that overstated their expenses while perpetrating wage theft and other abuses on mostly Latino migrant and immigrant workers;

Whereas, a governmental priority of recovery expenditures has not been the rebuilding of homes and communities, but the expansion of the prison industrial complex and the deployment of the national guard to residential neighborhoods in New Orleans;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include repairing and upgrading levees and floodwalls in a way that – as of June 2007 and at least through the end of 2011 – will protect predominantly white neighborhoods in New Orleans from flooding, but will not protect any African American neighborhood in New Orleans from flooding;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include providing huge tax breaks for private companies seeking to demolish public housing units in New Orleans that were not damaged by the hurricanes and take over other Gulf Coast neighborhoods for the purpose of building golf courses, condominiums and other housing that Gulf Coast residents cannot afford;

Whereas, the post-hurricane governmental programs include replacing public schools and public healthcare facilities with privately owned companies;

Whereas, nearly two years ago, more than 750,000 people from the Gulf Coast were displaced from their homes as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as well as substandard levees constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;

Whereas, to this present day, approximately 300,000 people suffer the injustice of prolonged displacement and remain separated from their homes, families, friends, and communities as a result of hostile governmental programs that deny their right to return home, which constitute an ethnic cleansing of New Orleans and the Gulf region;

Whereas, the Robert T. Stafford Act, the federal law establishing governmental responses to national disasters, mandates that the President has complete discretion in responding or not responding to a disaster and its after effects; and establishes that people affected by a disaster have no legal right to any assistance, including emergency medical care and shelter;

Whereas, the United Nations has established the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, which recognizes that people who are forced to flee their homes as a result of a natural or man-made disaster are internally displaced people, and provides protections for internally displaced people who would otherwise have neither a right to restorative justice nor protection from unfair and abusive treatment by governmental and private entities that unjustly prolong their displacement and deny their right to return;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* prohibits displacement that is aimed at or results in ethnic cleansing or altering the racial, ethnic or religious composition of the affected population;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to request and receive humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as the right to voluntarily to return to their communities or resettle;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to housing that requires governments to provide temporary housing for the duration of the displacement and support the rebuilding of permanent homes;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to education that requires governments to provide education and training facilities as soon as conditions permit;

Whereas, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* establishes the right of displaced persons to healthcare that includes mental health and social services;

Whereas, in international settings, the U.S. government has endorsed the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, encouraged other nations to adopt the *Guiding Principles* as binding national law, and established a foreign policy, *USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Policy*, which applies the *Guiding Principles* to the assistance that is provided by the U.S. government to displaced people in other countries;

Whereas, social justice and human rights organizations led by African Americans and other people of color in the Gulf Coast region are in the struggle to bring people back home which involves advocating that the government comply with the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, and seek to build a united front that dismantles the racist and regressive politics and governance controlling our communities in the South;

Therefore, be it resolved that the United States Social Forum ("USSF") People's Assembly stands in solidarity with the people of the Gulf Coast region who are struggling to rebuild their lives and communities and those who remain displaced;

Therefore, be it resolved that the USSF People's Assembly calls for a just, anti-racist, and sustainable rebuilding of the Gulf Coast that ends the U.S. government's human rights violations which have denied mostly African American residents of the Gulf Coast their right to return and rebuild; and have created a new slavery of mostly Latino migrant and immigrant people whose labor has been brutally exploited in the reconstruction of Gulf Coast communities;

Therefore, be it further resolved that the USSF People's Assembly advocates for federal laws that

- adopt the rights and duties established by the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* in order to protect the human rights of people from the Gulf Coast who are struggling to return to and rebuild their communities, as well as the human rights of all other people who become displaced as a result of a natural or man-made disaster;
- prohibit the exploitation and abuse of people, regardless of status, who work in the reconstruction of communities damaged by a disaster; and
- establish and fund the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, a civic works program in the Gulf Coast that would create 100,000 rebuilding jobs for the region's residents.