

April 10, 2008

President George W. Bush
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Stop the Demolitions and Corruption in New Orleans

Dear President Bush,

As international human rights and housing rights activists, members of international solidarity networks, global associations of inhabitants' rights, and tenant rights organizations working around the world, we decry the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans.

Specifically, we are concerned about reports that:

1. The demolitions will potentially displace more than 20,000 public housing residents from New Orleans, particularly African Americans and poor people, in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. These units have been demolished despite being sound and habitable – in fact they maintained minimum damage during the storms.
2. These decisions have been taken in the context of widespread concern over allegations of corruption by officials overseeing the demolition process, including allegations of self dealing and kickbacks.
3. Government officials have not ensured one-for-one replacement housing – leaving most former residents with no protection for their right to housing, including prolonged and perhaps permanent displacement, a violation of human rights standards in place for survivors of disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
4. The dignity and personal possessions of the former residents have not been respected in this process. Contractors have emptied apartments and discarded and even sold the personal property of residents, including articles of great sentimental and emotional value, without their consent.

Therefore, we urge you to facilitate an immediate halt to any remaining demolitions and ensure a rebuilding process for New Orleans, particularly with respect to public housing, and the greater Gulf Coast region that ensures real and active participation by residents – both those who have returned to the area and those who remain displaced. We additionally request that a commission of inquiry be established immediately to investigate (i) the procedural process that led to the demolitions and (ii) allegations of corruption in connection thereto.

Given the deprivation of housing rights facing public housing tenants who have survived Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the International Alliance of Inhabitants' Zero Evictions Campaign has instituted the "***Stop the Demolitions and Corruption in New Orleans***"¹ as its most recent global initiative. The Campaign has received a groundswell of support from concerned organizations, associations and citizens around the world.

The demolitions of public housing in New Orleans come at a time when housing rights protections in New Orleans are severely weakened. For example, rent in the New Orleans area has increased by an average of 43% since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This significant increase in rent comes at a time when Katrina and

¹ For more information on the Campaign, visit <http://eng.habitants.org/Campaigns-Zero-Evictions>.

Rita survivors living in FEMA trailers are being moved out of trailers and into the private rental market due to dangerous levels of formaldehyde. Moreover, New Orleans has seen its homeless population *double* since the hurricanes. These factors coupled with the demolition of over 4,800 units of public housing speak to the serious deprivations of the human right to housing facing New Orleans residents, as well as the right to return regardless of race or economic status. Moreover, these demolitions have been allowed to take place despite international concern as expressed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Miloon Kothari, UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in its Concluding Remarks to the U.S. government's report to the body. Specifically, on March 7, 2008, in its Concluding Remarks the Committee charged the U.S. to do more to remedy the effects of racial discrimination in housing and other areas. The Committee noted the "disparate impact that [the] natural disaster[s] continue to have on low income African Americans" and called for local and federal governments to help Katrina's displaced.²

Under human rights standards, governments must provide those who have been internally displaced by events such as natural disasters specific safeguards with respect to housing. Article 21(1) of the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which USAID recognizes when carrying out international development policy, states: "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of property and possessions." Moreover, Article 28 (1) states: "Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence ..."

Additionally, international human rights instruments speak to the human right to housing. Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was unanimously adopted by all the member countries of the United Nations, states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including ... housing ..." Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states: "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate ... housing ... and to the continuous improvement of living conditions." Additionally, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, a treaty to which the United States became a party in 1994, states: "States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, ... to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of ... the right to housing."³

As the United States has been a promoter of democracy, social inclusion and legality to the rest of world, we request and hope that the U.S. government will afford the same respect for human dignity and equality to the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that it has encouraged other nations to employ.

Sincerely,

International Alliance of Inhabitants – Italy
Oxfam - Netherlands
Institution "Collective Action" - Russian Federation
Catherine Peyge, Mayor of Bobigny - France
Unione Inquilini - Segretario Nazionale – Italy
CBTB Brasil - Brazil

² United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Remarks, March 7, 2008.

³ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Article 5(e)(iii).

Jubilee South - India
Articulacion Feminista Marcosur - Peru
All India Peoples Science Network - India
Parti Communiste Français (PCF) - France
Confédération Général du Travail (CGT) - France
Federation Urban Poor - Nigeria
PNI - Palestinian Territory
Via Campesina - France
Enda-TM – Senegal
Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions – United States
CADTM - Belgium
Associazione Kallipolis - Italy
LO.G.AU.SO - France
Abong - Brazil
Attac Japan - Japan
Power - United States
CADTM-NAD - The Democratic Republic of the Congo
CUT - Brazil
WEP - Nigeria
Comitato Inquilini Molise Calvairate Ponti - Italy
Ibase - Brazil
UACM - Mexico
Hic - Chile
Arci - Italy
Copevi - Mexico
Zimbabwe Social Forum - Zimbabwe
Istituto Paulo Freire - Brazil
Marches Européennes contre le Chomage - Austria
Ittijah - Palestinian Territory
Social Watch - Italy
Nigeria Social Forum, JDPC - Nigeria
Grassroots Global Justice - United States
Centro Martin Luter King - Cuba
Network Institute for Global Democratization - Finland
Nigerian Social Forum - Nigeria
Unione Inquilini - Italy
Centro de Estudios Concejalía Popular - Argentina
Action Aid - Nigeria
incoweb - Italy
Abuja Socialist Collective - Nigeria
Kebekache Women Development & Resource Centre - Nigeria
Solidaire (Sud) - France
Foro Social de S. Paolo - Brazil
CNTE Secc. XVIII - Mexico
Africa Social Forum - Senegal
OCLAE - Brazil
Al-Mesalla Centre Iraq - Iraq
Ubuntu Forum - Spain
SAP-Pakistan - Pakistan

OJA - Cote D'Ivoire
GARED - Togo
Alternative-FSN - Niger
Gambia Social Forum - Gambia
ATFD - Tunisia
ROAD - Cote D'Ivoire
Forum Social Mauritanien - Mauritania
LEADS - Nigeria
WCC - United Republic of Tanzania
AEDH - Belgium
Transform! - Austria
Jubileo Nicaragua - Nicaragua
FSPA - Brazil
One World Action - United Kingdom
AKSHARA – India
Associazione Kallipolis – Italy
Conseu - Spain
Campaña Cero Desalojos, AIH - Dominican Republic
Comité Peruano por el Derecho a una Vivienda Digna/ Alianza Internacional de Habitantes - Peru
CONAM - Confederação nacional das Associações de Moradores (Brasil) - Brazil
Associazione Diritti in Movimento - Italy
Movimiento Iniciativas Urbanas - Peru
Movimiento Comunitario - Goiás -Brasil - Brazil
Forum de Integração das Associações de Moradores de Viamão.RS - Brazil
Conselho Tutelar - Brazil
Juventude PT - Brazil
Associação Comunitaria do Jardim Previdência. - Brazil
Associação Comunitaria Amigos do Boqueirão. - Brazil

cc: Honorable David Vitter
Honorable Mary L. Landrieu
Honorable Wayne Allard
Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Honorable Hillary Clinton
Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
Honorable Evan Bayh
Honorable Robert F. Bennett
Honorable Sherrod Brown
Honorable Jim Bunning
Honorable Robert P. Casey
Honorable Tom Carper
Honorable Bob Corker
Honorable Mike Carpo
Honorable Elizabeth Dole
Honorable Michael E. Enzi
Honorable Chuck Hagel
Honorable Tim Johnson
Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Honorable Mel Martinez

Honorable John McCain
Honorable Robert Menendez
Honorable Barack Obama
Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Honorable Jack Reed
Honorable Harry Reid
Honorable Charles Schumer
Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Honorable Arlen Specter
Honorable Jon Tester
Honorable Barney Frank
Honorable Maxine Waters
Governor Bobby Jindal
Mayor Clarence Ray Nagin, Jr.
HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson
Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director UN-Habitat