

NATIONAL BLACK ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Resolution On Environmental and Economic Justice In The Gulf Coast Region Environmental Cleanup, Restoration And Rebuilding Sustainable Communities Post-Hurricane Katrina and Beyond©

The National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN) was founded in New Orleans, Louisiana in December 1999 in response to a State of Emergency in Black America. New Orleans was selected as the ideal location to launch NBEJN since the City of New Orleans, Louisiana and the Chemical Corridor, encompassing the area up to Baton Rouge, are under siege due to wide ranging environmental and economic assaults. These assaults are costing Black lives.

NBEJN values as sacred every human life regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status. We view the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath as a unique opportunity to shape the conversation and dialogue about rebuilding the Gulf Coast region including Gulf Coast states and Greater New Orleans in ways that provide environmental and economic justice for the entire affected population.

WHEREAS, race and class intersected with the Katrina disaster in ways that compound the impacts on Black communities and issues of race and class will affect environmental cleanup and restoration, public and environmental health, regional equity, community development and economic recovery;

WHEREAS, NBEJN is committed to alleviating and remedying the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on Black families, in particular, environmental, public health and economic consequences of the storm and its aftermath on the health and well being of survivors;

WHEREAS, the NBEJN post-hurricane focus centers on research, policy development and education advocacy, communications and media, outreach and networking in the areas of environmental justice; economic justice; environmental health; protection of public health; regional equity, sustainable development; cultural preservation; climate justice; homeland insecurity; and emergency responses;

WHEREAS, NBEJN and its members will monitor hearings and investigations convened by Congress, state legislatures and governmental agencies about Hurricane Katrina to ensure that the environmental and economic justice aspects of the disaster are prominent;

WHEREAS, there are urgent needs in hundreds of Black communities throughout the Gulf Coast region in terms of moving forward on environmental cleanup, habitability, restoration and rebuilding those areas devastated and/or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and the Lake Pontchartrain levee breaches;

WHEREAS, worker safety and health and public safety and health and public security are essential;

WHEREAS, concern about homeland insecurity among African American communities pre-dates Hurricane Katrina and these communities are uniquely affected due to their close proximity to petrochemical and chemical plants and other environmentally harmful facilities;

WHEREAS, all local, state and regional emergency preparedness plans must be designed to address the needs of people with low-incomes who don't have resources to evacuate themselves and their families in the event of natural and other disasters;

WHEREAS, there must be a governmental inventory, assessment of and response to the impacts of Hurricane Katrina on potentially hazardous permitted and non-permitted operations including treatment, storage and disposal facilities, Superfund sites, chemical weapons stockpiles, pesticide and chemical storage facilities, refineries and manufacturing plants, and other existing and potential environmental hazards in the Gulf Coast region;

WHEREAS, local zoning ordinances must be promulgated to prohibit siting, permitting and operation of heavy industrial facilities adjacent to, in or near residential areas,

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WHEREAS, there must be continuous testing and monitoring of drinking water and water quality in and around Greater New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region and testing must occur short- medium- and long-term;

WHEREAS, global warming and climate change have dire health and environmental consequences in vulnerable African-American communities in the Gulf Coast region and elsewhere;

WHEREAS, wetlands preservation, restoration and erosion control must be accelerated to protect the Gulf Coast Region and in the Mississippi River chemical corridor;

WHEREAS, in consultation with affected communities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and engineering experts should be delegated the responsibility of designing, constructing and maintaining a better, more effective system of levees, improved drainage, and rerouting of the flood control systems that continually inundate the lower 9th Ward community;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Interior and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should ensure that these re-engineering, wetlands preservation and restoration, and flood prevention and drainage efforts are fully funded;

WHEREAS, expediency in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina cannot be a pretext to weaken or waive environmental authorities in the Gulf Coast region or elsewhere in the United States including all existing local, state, regional and federal environmental laws and regulations;

WHEREAS, environmental cleanups must be conducted fairly and equitably in every affected community including decisions about areas wherein the most stringent cleanup levels will be applied during restoration, redevelopment and rebuilding;

WHEREAS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security must comply with Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice including immediate action on new disaster preparedness models that address the needs and challenges of the lowest income person in every community;

WHEREAS, fair and equitable access to and distribution of resources is paramount in all post-hurricane operations and activities, minority businesses in the environmental, community development and construction sectors must be utilized in the short- medium and long-term cleanup and rebuilding efforts;

WHEREAS, there must be a public process to develop a broad, socially and equitably just vision for a new, revitalized Gulf Coast region and Greater New Orleans, encompassing prominent roles for poor, low and moderate income African-Americans in designing and implementing the vision and the rebuilding plans;

WHEREAS, economic parity is a cardinal objective in a revitalized and renewed Gulf Coast region and Greater New Orleans, cultural preservation, poverty alleviation and sustainable development are highly valued, central facets of every revitalization strategy;

WHEREAS, local jurisdictions in the Gulf Coast region must not use eminent domain in the rebuilding process in ways that result in taking of properties in Black communities in order to convert them to public or other uses;

WHEREAS, redevelopment and revitalization plans and rebuilding infrastructure must benefit those communities most affected by the hurricane, these efforts cannot exacerbate gentrification in ways that result in more residential and commercial displacement for Black people, many or whom are poor;

WHEREAS, rebuilding activities in the Gulf Coast region must first deploy local businesses and hire local Black workers and local low-income workers to participate in the rebuilding efforts;

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WHEREAS, jurisdictions in the Gulf Coast region must focus on creating sustainable low and moderate income housing (concentrating on historic and cultural preservation), and address the fair housing issues embedded in the temporary and long-term resettlement of surviving evacuated Black families;

WHEREAS, the private sector must exercise caution in real estate and business financing and property-casualty insurance practices to prevent insurance and lender redlining and price-gouging and to ensure that insurance claims are paid fairly and equitably;

WHEREAS, local, state, regional and federal government agencies must exercise oversight to ensure that post-hurricane insurance and banking practices are fair and equitable;

WHEREAS, continuing the education of the young survivors of the hurricane, children and youth, must be a priority at the levels of pre-kindergarten, elementary, high school, secondary and post secondary education;

WHEREAS, full employment, job placement, job training and worker re-training programs are key to restoring the lives of Gulf Coast survivors and achieving economic justice;

WHEREAS, a Reparations And Victims Compensation Fund should be established to benefit all persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina and African-Americans should receive just and equitable compensation from such a fund;

WHEREAS, special outreach efforts must address and assist undocumented persons and other immigrants in a time of disaster including those who don't speak English;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN) is committed to rebuilding the Gulf Coast Region including Greater New Orleans in collaboration with stakeholders, local, state, regional and federal elected officials, governmental agency officials and other entities in the public and private sectors;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Black Environmental Justice Network calls on stakeholders, local, state, regional and federal elected officials, governmental agency officials and other entities in the public and private sectors to adopt environmental and economic justice principles and approaches in the Gulf Coast Region cleanup, restoration and rebuilding efforts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all federal and state efforts should comply with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, and United Nations directives on displaced persons.

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