

**New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice**

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New Orleans, Louisiana 70113

September 9, 2008

Secretary Chertoff  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

As Hurricane Gustav approached the Gulf Coast last week, thousands of immigrant workers and their families were fearful of evacuation. Even more than the prospect of a category-4 hurricane, immigrant communities feared immigration checkpoints and raids during the evacuation. That is why the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice ("NOWCRJ") asked you for an assurance that there would be no immigration checkpoints along the evacuation route.

When the NOWCRJ gained that key assurance from you, just as the mandatory evacuations began, thousands of immigrant workers and their families in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast were able to evacuate safely, without fear. We thank the Department of Homeland Security for prioritizing human life and safety at a time of disaster by stating publicly that "there are no immigration enforcement operations and there are no immigration checkpoints associated with the evacuations."

As evacuees now return, and as more storms approach, we write to ask that you further ensure that immigrant workers, their families, and their communities have access to humanitarian relief during every phase of a disaster.

First, we ask that DHS issue a clear statement that its assurances made in the context of Hurricane Gustav will continue to stand as policy during future disasters. In times of impending humanitarian crisis, communities should be able to plan their evacuations without first having to seek assurances of safety from DHS.

Second, the value of the public assurances you made to our communities as Hurricane Gustav approached underscores the need for DHS to adopt and publish mandatory guidelines clarifying that no one should fear immigration enforcement operations during any phase of the disaster. We therefore request that DHS adopt and publish mandatory guidelines consistent with DHS's focus on "life-saving and life-sustaining activities, preventing the loss of property to the extent possible, and assisting with a speedy recovery of the affected region." These mandatory

guidelines should ensure that all evacuees and their families will have safety and equal access to humanitarian care during every phase of disaster—including evacuation, sheltering, return, and reconstruction – without regard to race, national origin, or immigration status.

Third, we reiterate the request for a meeting with you so that NOWCRJ and other organizations representing affected communities have the opportunity to discuss the urgent need for these published mandatory guidelines and to recommend specific policy proposals.

In the three years since Katrina, NOWCRJ's members and other immigrant workers have worked to rebuild devastated Gulf Coast communities. As immigrant workers committed to fundamental reconstruction work vital to the region's future, they faced astounding levels of wage theft and brutal labor exploitation by employers. While the federal government suspended enforcement of laws guaranteeing labor, health, and safety standards for workers, immigration raids continued to terrorize their Gulf Coast communities. These enforcement priorities created chaos and instability in reconstruction workers' communities and interrupted the critical reconstruction work necessary for a speedy recovery of the region. The extent of the interruption is apparent: in New Orleans alone, vast areas of the city are still not rebuilt.

As Hurricane Gustav approached on the third anniversary of Katrina's devastation, Gulf Coast immigrant communities could not help but remember the trauma and exploitation to which they have been subjected in the three years since Hurricane Katrina. This time, as immigrant communities were directed to evacuate, their biggest obstacle to seeking life-saving humanitarian assistance was the fear that immigration enforcement actions would be prioritized before lifesaving humanitarian assistance. Fearing that DHS checkpoints, investigations, and enforcement actions might occur during evacuation, shelter, return, and reconstruction, many initially refused to accept life-saving help.

We therefore add our support to these requests on behalf of NOWCRJ's members-- day laborers and other reconstruction workers and their families-- and immigrant communities in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast. As Hurricane Ike gathers momentum, and as other disasters loom, we hope that the DHS will respond affirmatively to ensure that immigrant workers and their families never have to choose between the possibility of death and deportation.

Sincerely,

On behalf of members of the Congress of Day Laborers and the Alliance of Guestworkers for Dignity, grassroots projects of the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice

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Saket Soni  
Director  
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice

## Supporting Organizations:

1. AFL-CIO
2. American Friends Service Committee
3. Annunciation House, Inc.
4. Archdiocese of Cincinnati Immigration Task Force
5. Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
6. Association for Public Interest law
7. Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
8. BARCA, Inc.
9. Berkshire Immigrant Center
10. California Immigrant Policy Center
11. Carlisle Immigrant Solidarity Committee
12. Catholic Center, The
13. Catholic Charities
14. Catholic Charities of Central Florida
15. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge
16. Center for Community Change
17. Center For Participatory Change
18. Centro de Servicios Hispanos; Neighbor's Place
19. CITA, Centro Independiente de Trabajadores Agricolas
20. Coalicion de Lideres Latinos - Dalton
21. Coloradoans for Immigrant Rights
22. Cross Border Network
23. Democracy in Action
24. East Tennessee Interfaith Worker Justice
25. El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos
26. Empire Justice Center
27. Farm Labor Organizing Committee
28. Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
29. H. S. Power & Light - Latino Faith Initiative
30. Hispanic Coalition (Miami, Florida)
31. Hispanic Ministry, Diocese of Charlotte
32. Hispano Latino For Cultural Alliance
33. Hitec Aztec Communications
34. Human Rights USA
35. IME
36. Immigrant Legal Resource Center
37. Interfaith Worker Justice
38. IRATE
39. Jobs With Justice
40. Korean American Resource & Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
41. Korean Resource Center, Los Angeles, CA
42. La Union del Pueblo (LUPE)
43. Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)
44. Loyola University New Orleans College of Law
45. Maurice & Jane Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice
46. MEASURE Evaluation
47. National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
48. National Council of La Raza
49. National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)
50. National Employment Law Project
51. National Immigration Forum
52. National Immigration Law Center
53. National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
54. National Lawyers Guild
55. National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
56. Nebraska Appleseed
57. New Jersey Immigration Policy Network
58. New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice
59. Northwest Federation of Community Organizations
60. Offices Of Claudia Davidson
61. OSLSA Immigrant Rights Task Force
62. Oxfam America
63. Parroquia San Miguel Arcangel
64. Peace and Freedom Party
65. Progressive States Network
66. Proyecto Azteca
67. Public Interest Resource Center, Fordham Law School
68. Rappahannock Legal Services
69. Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center
70. Roger Williams School of Law
71. San Felipe de Jesus Catholic Church, Brownsville, TX
72. Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
73. SOUL
74. South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT).
75. South Asian Network
76. Southern Poverty Law Center
77. Southwest Creations Collaborative
78. St. John's School of Law

79. Student Hurricane Network
80. Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
81. Texas Civil Rights Project
82. The Ohio State University Clinical Programs
83. UNITE HERE Local 11
84. United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America
85. United Farm Workers of America
86. United Food and Commercial Workers International Union

87. United Workers / Trabajadores Unidos
88. Voces de la Frontera
89. Western Mass Labor Action
90. Western Mass Legal Services
91. WISDOM, The Gamaliel Foundation in Wisconsin
92. Working Hands Legal Clinic
93. Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring
94. Workplace Justice Project, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center

Supporting Individuals:

1. Judy Ancel, Director, Missouri-Kansas City to Institute for Labor Studies\*
2. Sister Mary Corripio
3. Lenore Dowling, Rio Hondo College\*
4. Margaret Donahue
5. Julie du Bois
6. Herminia Garcia
7. Porfirio Quintano
8. Margarita Romo, City of Dade, FL\*
9. Jose Tello
10. Yungsohn Park

\*(for identification purposes only)