

International Advisory Group on Forced Evictions Investigates New Orleans Housing Crisis

July 21st 2009, New Orleans – Members of the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE), will arrive in New Orleans next week to investigate the forced eviction of thousands of residents as part of the city's ongoing post-Hurricane Katrina redevelopment. International experts Leilani Farha from Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation and Leticia Osorio from Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) will be leading the visit. They will be joined by a team of local experts.

AGFE advises the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT in addressing unlawful forced evictions and promotes alternatives to forced eviction. The investigation will be the third visit by an international authority to New Orleans in the past three years, demonstrating continuing concern about the approach the city is taking to housing and redevelopment

During the fact-finding mission between July 26th and July 31st, independent experts from the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions will travel to affected communities across the city, focusing on three principal issues: the demolition of public housing; the displacement of Mid City residents to make way for the Louisiana State University hospital; and growing homelessness.

Residents will also share their experiences of forced eviction and their vision for a rebuilding process at a Town Hall meeting with the Advisory Group on Sunday July 26th.

The Advisory Group will then meet with local government officials, including representatives from the mayor's office, city council and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), before traveling to Washington DC to meet with federal officials working on post disaster recovery.

The forced evictions being investigated in New Orleans come as a result of a rebuilding process that favors private sector interests over the interests of residents. This emphasis on private sector development is being felt across the country with devastating effects including the current economic crisis, which has its roots in the housing sector. While post-Katrina redevelopment policies have had a disproportionately adverse impact on poor and low-income African American communities, the ongoing lack of affordable housing, and the evictions to make way for private sector development, is a significant issue for all residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

Commenting on the situation, Sam Jackson, a local resident and founder of housing rights advocacy organization Mayday New Orleans, said:

"Folks who lived in low-income housing have been having real problems since the demolition of almost all the public housing two years ago. The vouchers they've been given for replacement housing don't go near covering the rent for a whole family. Finding an affordable three or four bedroom apartment is nearly impossible."

The Advisory Group promotes a participatory development model and recommends solutions to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT that are geared towards recognition of residents' human right to housing and greater involvement by affected communities in the rebuilding process.

A schedule for the visit and a fact sheet on the issues being investigated by the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions are available at:

Fact sheet: http://www.nesri.org/AGFE_NOLA_July_2009_Factsheet.pdf

Schedule: http://www.nesri.org/AGFE_NOLA_July_2009_Schedule.pdf

For further information, please contact:

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Notes to editors

1. The Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) is an advisory body to UN-HABITAT, the United Nations agency for human settlements. The primary objective of AGFE is to advise the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT in addressing unlawful forced evictions and to promote alternative policies. AGFE has conducted missions throughout the world, including Rome, Santo Domingo and London.

For further information see:

http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/AGFEmandate_revised2008.pdf

2. The AGFE fact-finding mission to New Orleans is taking place in line with its mandate to “monitor and identify, and, if so requested, to promote alternatives to unlawful evictions.” AGFE missions are carried out upon request by UN-HABITAT in response to invitations from government agencies, reports by UN-HABITAT country offices, and warnings from other UN agencies and civil society organizations. The mission to New Orleans was requested by the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and attorney Bill Quigley.

3. The organizations supporting the fact-finding mission are: [Advocates for Environmental Human Rights](#), [Center for Constitutional Rights](#), Center for Fair Housing, [Coastal Women for Change](#), Committee to Reopen Charity Hospital, [Louisiana Justice Institute](#), [Loyola Law Clinic](#), [Mayday New Orleans](#), [Mississippi Center for Justice](#), [National Economic and Social Rights Initiative](#), [National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty](#), Survivors Village, [UNITY of Greater New Orleans](#), [US Human Rights Network](#). Members of Mayday New Orleans, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative will be participating in the AGFE mission as local and technical experts.

4. While there are no precise figures on the racial breakdown of poor and low-income people still displaced from New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, indications strongly suggest that they are overwhelmingly African American. The African American population of New Orleans has dropped by 57 percent since Katrina, while the White population fell 36 percent, according to census data.

5. For further information on housing rights issues in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, please see:

<http://wiki.nlchp.org/display/Manual/New+Orleans+and+Gulf+Coast>

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