

## **UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing Official Visits New Orleans**

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita displaced over 2,000,000 people in the gulf coast region. Government policies aimed at private sector development have prevented the return of a quarter of the New Orleans population and contributed to a significant rise in homelessness, double the number before Katrina. This visit will be a follow-up to the recent International Advisory Group on Forced Evictions fact-finding mission to New Orleans. In addition, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing will investigate the following issues:

### **Homelessness**

- The New Orleans homeless population is estimated at 12,000 people, double the number before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- An estimated additional 5,000-10,000 individuals are squatting in abandoned residential and commercial buildings.
- In a survey conducted in 2008, 60% of homeless individuals said they became homeless after Hurricane Katrina and 30% said they had received rental assistance at some point from FEMA, but no longer.
- All of New Orleans' 818 permanent supportive housing units, 719 transitional housing units and 254 shelter beds are always filled to capacity

### **Public Housing**

- On December 20, 2007 the New Orleans City Council approved the demolition of the "Big Four" public housing complexes: B.W. Cooper, C.J Peete, Lafitte, and St. Bernard, which contained nearly 4,500 units, in order to replace them with "mixed-income developments."
- Redevelopment plans will include only 750 units of public housing in new mixed-income developments, meaning a total loss of 3,750 units of public housing.
- The new mixed-income housing units will cost \$400,000 each to build, but it would have cost only \$10,000 each to repair units in the Big Four.

### **Affordability Crisis**

- Rents in New Orleans are now 52% higher than pre-Katrina figures.
- 80% more portable Housing Choice Vouchers were handed out as rental assistance immediately after Katrina than in all of 2005, although only 2/5 of rental units damaged by the storm were to be replaced or rebuilt according to redevelopment plans.
- Over 70% of households earning under \$35,000 lived in unaffordable housing or were spending more than 30% of income on housing in 2007.

### **Mid-City**

- New Orleans will demolish homes and replace public housing with two university hospitals. 64.3% of residents of Mid-City were African American and 60.1% were renters. The construction of the hospitals would destroy 25 square blocks and 165 historic homes.