

PRESS RELEASE***For Immediate Release***

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Over 30 Human Rights Organizations Call for Review of Circumstances Surrounding the Jena 6**Groups Call on Governor of Louisiana to Condemn the Hanging of Nooses from a Tree at Jena High School and Ensure Review of the Criminal Proceedings Against the Jena 6**

NEW YORK – September 19, 2007. Over 30 human rights organizations and scholars, including Amnesty International USA, Human Rights Watch, the U.S. Human Rights Network and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI), have called on the Governor of Louisiana to ensure review of the criminal proceedings against the Jena 6 and to make a statement condemning the hanging of nooses from a tree at Jena High School, an incident that gave rise to racial tensions and the fight for which the six African American students known as the “Jena 6” were arrested.

Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the U.S. Human Rights Network said:

While we applaud the actions of Louisiana's Third Circuit Court of Appeals last Friday vacating the conviction of Mychal Bell, this is only a first step to address the human rights issues in this case. Authorities must take immediate further action to ensure that the overall culture of the school respects human rights and promotes understanding across communities.”

Catherine Albisa, Executive Director of NESRI said:

A wide range of studies, including NESRI's own latest human rights report - Deprived of Dignity - demonstrate that the circumstances surrounding the Jena 6 are one manifestation of degrading school environments and the criminalization of students found across the country. This is a human rights crisis in education that merits an urgent national response

Moreover, both of these human rights advocates also expressed deep concern that the prosecutor in Mychal Bell's case has expressed his intent to appeal.

The six African American boys, aged 15 to 17, known as the Jena 6 were charged with crimes as adults for a school fight. In the letter, human rights organizations stated that “We understand that consequences must be imposed for their actions. However, international human rights laws binding on the federal government and the state of Louisiana recognize that children should not be tried as adults or subjected to excessive punishments that fail to

focus on their rehabilitation. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the United States became a party in 1992, specifically acknowledges the need for special treatment of children in the criminal justice system and emphasizes the importance of their rehabilitation...Moreover, Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child ... shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.”

The fight for which the six boys were arrested came after a series of incidents that began in September 2006 when an African American student challenged the *de facto* segregation of his school’s grounds by asking permission to sit under the “white tree” on campus. The next day three nooses hung from the tree. The Superintendent classified this historically laden act as an adolescent “prank.”

Human rights organizations call on the Governor “to make a statement condemning the hanging of the nooses and to encourage concrete actions on the part of the school to promote racial understanding and eliminate bias.” Article 2 of 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 that governments must “condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races.” Article 7 calls on governments to “undertake to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination.”

On September 20, 2007 human rights activists will travel to Jena for the rally in support of Jena 6. Following the rally there will be a town hall meeting and panel discussion in Alexandria, LA entitled, "Restoring the Human Right to Education: Abolishing the School to Prison Pipeline." Speakers will include Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the U.S. Human Rights Network, Cathy Albisa, Executive Director of NESRI, Lisa Crooms, Professor at Howard University School of Law and Judge Pamela Johnson from Louisiana