

Factsheet

The Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) Visits New Orleans

Mission: The Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) advises the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT in addressing unlawful forced evictions and promoting alternative solutions. AGFE conducts fact-finding missions to countries where current or planned cases of forced evictions have been identified. During these missions, AGFE monitors and documents forced evictions, meets with impacted communities, and facilitates dialogue between government, local communities and other stakeholders. The mission will be conducted by two international experts Leilani Farha from Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation and Leticia Osorio from Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions. The AGFE fact-finding mission to New Orleans was requested by the National Economic Social Rights Initiative and attorney Bill Quigley. 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.

Date: From **July 26-31, 2009** AGFE is conducting a **fact-finding mission to New Orleans**, including a **visit to Washington, DC** to speak with federal officials. After the visit, UN-HABITAT will publish **a report of the experts' findings** on the UN-HABITAT website.

Past International Concern for Post Katrina New Orleans

- **July 2006** - The UN Human Rights Council reminded the U.S. government to ensure that the rights to housing, healthcare, and education for poor communities, particularly African Americans, be protected in post Hurricane Katrina and Rita rebuilding.
- **February 2008** - The UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari, and the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, released a joint press statement calling for a halt to the demolition of public housing in post Katrina New Orleans.
- **March 2008** - The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) called upon the U.S. local and federal government to aid displaced victims of Katrina, noting the storm's disproportionate impact on low-income African Americans.
- **May 2009** - In his official report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, Doudou Diène, noted that the federal government was not ensuring the return of displaced persons to New Orleans and denounced the demolition of public housing there.

Issues Highlighted During Visit

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. The AGFE mission will investigate the following issues:

Human Rights Issues Highlighted During Visit (contd.)

Affordability Crisis

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

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.

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**

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**.