

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERSHIP PROJECT (AALP)
(OF NEW ORLEANS)**

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TO: THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

**ATTN: US REP. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE, CBC LEGISLATIVE
WEEKEND EVENT CHAIRPERSON**

**FROM: THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERSHIP PROJECT OF
NEW ORLEANS (AALP)**

RE: AALP PERSPECTIVE ON THE REBUILDING OF THE CITY

The AALP is a 3 year old network of about 50 New Orleans African-American community, business and religious leaders and representatives that focuses on Agenda building, policy analysis, strategic dialogue and consensus building. Prior to the Katrina disaster, we had developed an Agenda of common interests to potentially guide future policy choices and community actions. Since Katrina, we have been scattered to many locations, but through phone discussions and e-mails, the broad outline of our response to the disaster is emerging. We wish to convey our initial position to you and the Caucus as part of the debate on the National position of the CBC, and the content of any proposed legislation. We would be delighted to discuss the points in this document with you and other CBC members, and offer testimony to any committee hearings that may ensue. We believe that the AALP and numerous other groups are articulating the same position: rebuild a New Orleans that is more just and equitable for the citizens who were displaced, and eliminate racial and class inequities.

The rebuilding and reconstruction of the city of New Orleans is an important historical, practical, and cultural imperative for the US today. New Orleans (aka African Orleans) is arguably the US city that most displays African cultural retentions and traditions, effortlessly blended into everyday life.. It is also a city that evidences how a diversity of human cultures blend into a mosaic that demonstrates the essence of the multicultural idea that America still dreams of. The Crescent city is one of the worlds great "Cultural cities," with a grand musical, culinary, architectural, religious, life rhythmic, folk, artistic and literary tradition comparable to any in the world. Indeed, New Orleans represents an indigenous people's "way of life," and an extraordinarily unique human civilization.

Yet despite its great cultural assets, it is also a city with deep racial and class divisions rooted in the history of slavery, racial segregation and socioeconomic disparities and inequalities. The faces of Katrina gave living expression to the numbing statistics on the quality of life for a significant number of African Americans (that most social observers already knew). In our city, 35-40% of African-American are in poverty with a 20% homeownership rate a, 14% business ownership rate, \$17k/year per capita income, 6,700 inmates, about 31,000 mis-educated children, and we suffer from higher disease, death, and incarceration rates etc. Perhaps rebuilding the city offers a unique historical and

practical opportunity to promote racial justice, equity and healing resulting from the centuries of racial oppression and exploitation i.e. to “humanize” the city.. The displaced African-American community and low-income households of all races can be integrated into the “new” Orleanean economy in ways never imagined in the past. If the city is rebuilt, it must address such inequities so that the displaced population perceives New Orleans as a city of quality, opportunity, and justice with a dramatically improved quality of life.

We suggest that the hundreds of billions in federal resources be targeted to: 1) improving human development and capacity 2) rebuilding the physical infrastructure and 3) rebuilding the institutional systems. New Orleans could then become a model of the sustainable and just city in the global era. We suggest the following principles and **Citizen Bill of rights**’ as the framework and values orientation that should guide the Rebuilding, Reconstruction and Recovery process. We call on the congressional Black Caucus to give serious consideration to these principles as the legislation to fund the rebuilding of New Orleans is considered.

1. All displaced persons should maintain. the “**right of return**” to New Orleans as a “**Human right**” Whether persons are working class , middle class or poor and marginal, or whether they were voluntarily evacuated, mandatorily evacuated, or were forced to do so should have no bearing on this fundamental right.. This right shall include the provision of adequate transportation to return to the city by the same means that a person was dispersed. **THE CITY SHOULD NOT BE DEPOPULATED OF ITS AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND LOWER INCOME CITIZENS,** and must be rebuilt to economically include all those who were displaced
2. All displaced persons must retain their **right of citizenship** in the city, especially including the right to vote in the next municipal elections. Citizen rights to the franchise must be protected and widely explained to all dispersed persons. The provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 should be examined and enforced in this regard
3. All displaced persons should have the **right to shape and envision the future** of the city. Shaping the future should not be left to elected officials, appointed commissions, developers and/or business interests alone. We the citizens are the primary stakeholders of a re-imagined New Orleans. Thus we MUST be directly involved in imagining the future. Provisions must be included to insure this right.
4. All displaced persons should have the **right to participate in the rebuilding** of the city as owners, producers, providers, planners, developers, workers, and direct beneficiaries. Participation must especially include African-Americans and the poor, and those previously excluded from the development process
5. In a rebuilding the city, all displaced persons should have the **right to quality goods and services based** on equity and equality. Disparities and inequality must be eliminated in all aspects of social, economic and political life. It should be illegal to discriminate against an individual due to their income, occupation or educational status, in addition to the traditional categories of race, gender, religion, language, disability ,culture or other social status

6. In a rebuilding the city, all displaced persons should have the **right to affordable neighborhoods**, quality affordable housing, adequate health care, good schools, repaired infrastructure,, a livable environment and improved transportation and hurricane safety.
7. In a rebuilt city, workers, especially hospitality workers should have the **right to be paid a livable wage** with good benefits.
8. In a rebuilding the city, African-American should have the **right to increase economic benefits and ownership**. The percentage of enterprises MUST dramatically increase from the present 14% , and the access to wealth and ownership must also be dramatically improved.
9. In rebuilding the city, African-Americans and any low income populations should be given **preferential treatment in cleanup, construction and operational work associated with rebuilding the city.**
10. In rebuilding the city, **contracting preference should also be given to Communiity Development collaboratives, community and faith-based corporations/organizations, and New Orleans businesses that partner with nonprofit service providers and people of color.** No contracts should be let to companies that disregard Davis-Bacon, Affirmative action and local participation. Proposed legislation to create a “recovery opportunity zone” should specifically include Community Development organizations and minority firms as alternatives to the no bid multi-national companies. Over the last 30 years, such firms have demonstrated their capacity to successfully build hundreds of thousands of quality affordable housing, and neighborhood commercial and businesses and service enterprises.
11. In rebuilding the city, priority must be given to **making the city hurricane safe, rather than the destruction of Black neighborhoods or communities.** Priority must also be given to disaster planning and evacuation plans that work for the most transit dependent populations and the most vulnerable residents of the city.
12. In rebuilding the city, priority must be given to the **right to preservation of its rich and diverse cultural traditions**, and the social experiences of Black people that produce the culture. **THE CITY MUST NOT BE CULTURALLY, ECONOMICALLY OR SOCIALLY GENTRIFIED. AND BECOME A SOULLESS COLLECTION OF CONDOS AND tract home NEIGHBORHOODS FOR THE RICH**

We also respectfully request that the CBC initiate its own Commission to thoroughly investigate all aspects of the physical and human dimensions of the Katrina disaster.

The AALP and other groups is calling on all displaced New Orleanians to unite behind these principles and Bill Of Rights as we proceed to rebuild and reconstruct our homeland. We sincerely invite the CBC and its constituencies to join us in this **3rd RECONSTRUCTION”**

Mrs. Gail Glapion, AALP Chairperson:

Mtangulizi Sanyika, AALP Project Manager

cc: US Rep. William Jefferson (D-New Orleans)