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NGO Update

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NGO UPDATE

To foster communication among human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an "NGO Update." This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Human Rights Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of the column.

This fall the NGO Update is focused on organizations working along the Gulf Coast of the United States in communities that were affected by the recent hurricanes.

US HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

www.ushrnetwork.org

The US Human Rights Network was formed to promote U.S. adherence to international human rights standards by building linkages between organizations and individuals working on human rights issues in the United States. The Network strives toward building a human rights culture in the United States that puts those directly affected by human rights violations in a central leadership role. The Network also seeks to connect the U.S. human rights movement with broader social justice movements in the country and around the world. It is headed by a Coordinating Committee comprised of leading human rights organizers, lawyers, policy analysts, educators, researchers, and scholars. The leadership also includes individuals directly affected by human rights violations. Hadar Harris, Executive Director of the American University Washington College of Law Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, is a member of the Network's Coordinating Committee.

The US Human Rights Network has been assisting members with responding to the recent hurricanes along the Gulf Coast of the United States. The Network has set up

a blog page, http://ushrnetwork.typepad.com/hurricane_katrina, where members and readers can discuss forthcoming issues and post concerns and hopes for dealing with the aftermath of the hurricanes. It has also set up a webpage, <http://www.ushrnetwork.org/page5.cfm>, with links to some of the latest alternative news on the hurricanes. In addition, the US Human Rights Network has identified several direct-service organizations that are accepting donations and/or shipments of non-perishable items for people in need in Louisiana and Texas:

Center for LIFE Outreach Center
Attn: Minister Pamela Robinson
121 Saint Landry Street
Lafayette, LA 70506
(337) 504-5374

Mohammad Mosque 65
Attn: Minister Andrew Muhammad
2600 Plank Road
Baton Rouge, LA 70805
(225) 923-1400
(225) 357-3079

Lewis Temple CME Church
Attn: Rev. Dr. Ricky Helton
272 Medgar Evers Street
Grambling, LA 71245
(318) 247-3793

St. Luke Community United Methodist Church
c/o Hurricane Katrina Victims
Attn: Pastor Tom Waitschies
5710 East R.L. Thornton Freeway
Dallas, TX 75223
(214) 821-2970

S.H.A.P.E. Community Center
Attn: Deloyd Parker
3815 Live Oak
Houston, TX 77004
(713) 521-0641

ADVOCATES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS (AEHR)

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR) is a non-profit, public interest law firm founded by former EarthJustice

Legal Defense Fund attorneys Monique Harden and Nathalie Walker in New Orleans, Louisiana. AEHR provides a broad range of litigation and public advocacy services to primarily African-American communities. AEHR focuses on providing these services where fundamental human rights to life, health, and racial equality are systematically violated by government laws, policies, and practices that facilitate and perpetuate severe environmental degradation. In March 2005 AEHR filed a petition with the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of African-American residents from Mossville, Louisiana. The petition alleges that there are unhealthy and hazardous conditions in Mossville resulting from authorization by the United States of 14 toxic industrial operations that lie in very close proximity to the town. The petition also alleges that these conditions violate fundamental human rights of life, health, and racial equality. It seeks medical care for Mossville's residents, relocation to healthier surroundings, and health-based reforms to the environmental regulatory system. Presently the action is pending with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

For more information please contact Monique Harden at mharden-aehr@cox.net or Natalie Walker at nwalker-aehr@cox.net.

SOUTHERN EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (SEP)

www.southernempowerment.org

The Southern Empowerment Project (SEP) is an association of member-run, community-based organizations. SEP supports oppressed communities in Kentucky, South Carolina, and Tennessee in challenging racism and social injustice. SEP recruits and trains community leaders to assist organizations in the southern United States to solve community problems. SEP training sessions include in-depth community organizing and grassroots fundraising. Topics addressed in the community organizing trainings include building membership

organizations, models of social change, the role of organizers, leadership development, grassroots fundraising, challenging “isms” (racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism), accountability, and strategy. Fundraising training topics include: appropriate methods in different approaches to social change; who gives money and why; the role of the organizer and the fundraiser; developing a donor base; and elements of successful fundraising programs.

The SEP is providing organizational support to community organizations and social justice groups involved in rebuilding neighborhoods, towns, and cities along the Gulf Coast of the United States that were severely hit by hurricanes this fall. A list of the organizations that SEP is associated with is available on the organization’s website.

THE MISSISSIPPI WORKERS’ CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

www.msworkerscenter.org

The Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human Rights was founded in 1996 in Oxford, Mississippi, by human rights activist and attorney Jaribu Hill. The Center’s concept grew out of the Southern Human Rights Organizers’ Conference in September 1996, where activists recognized the need for a new approach to solving the pressing problems facing Mississippi’s low-

wage workers, most of whom are not unionized. The workers had no recourse and needed programs that spoke to the quality of their lives both inside and outside of the workplace. The Center began providing organizing support, legal representation, and training for low-wage, non-union workers in the state of Mississippi shortly thereafter. As an advocacy organization that links legal strategies with organizing strategies, the Center represents an alternative to traditional labor organizations. The Center now has a membership of over 600 workers and supporters.

The Center’s work focuses on two primary campaign areas: “Terror on the Plant Floor,” which assists workers in challenging hate crimes in the workplace (e.g., hanging nooses in public places, Ku Klux Klan terror, and racist graffiti on bathroom walls), and “Dying to Make a Living,” which focuses on environmental justice in the workplace and provides workers with information about chemical poisons and toxic substances. In response to the devastation by the hurricanes this fall, the Center has also established the Mississippi Workers’ Center Southern Relief Fund for Hurricane Katrina Victims. This is a separate fund that is used to provide relief to hurricane victims.

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of “NGO Update.” If your organization has an event or situation it

would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu and include “NGO Update” in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations. **HRB**

Lauren Bartlett, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers NGOs for the Human Rights Brief.

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The bill also amends the Microenterprise for Self-Reliance Act of 2000 to extend availability of the microcredit program to vulnerable populations. It amends the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to include military education and training on the protection of vulnerable populations and authorizes the President to provide assistance to programs that protect vulnerable populations during humanitarian emergencies. Finally, the bill expresses Congress’ view that the UN should strengthen the ability of its Department of Peacekeeping Operations to protect civilians, especially women and children, from sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel. **HRB**

Ryan Vogel, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers Legislative Watch for the Human Rights Brief.

REVIEW OF CONFERENCE: continued from page 9

ENDNOTES: Curry

¹ The American University Washington College of Law created the War Crimes Research Office (WCRO) in 1995 with funding from the Open Society Institute following a request for research assistance from the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In the 10 years since its creation, the WCRO has provided confidential research on discrete issues of international criminal and humanitarian law to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and the Special Panels on Serious Crimes in East Timor, and has provided technical assistance to those working to establish the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia.

² Some notable conference participants include Luis Moreno-Ocampo, Prosecutor, ICC; Judge Navanethem Pillay, Appeal Judge, ICC, and former Judge, ICTR; Judge Patricia Wald, former Judge, ICTY; David Scheffer, former U.S. Ambassador-at-large for War Crimes; Judge Phillip Rapoza, former Judge, Special Panels for Serious Crimes in East Timor, and Judge, Massachusetts Court of Appeals; Aryeh Neier, President, Open Society Institute; David Tolbert, Deputy Prosecutor, ICTY; David Crane, former Prosecutor, Special Court for Sierra Leone; Siri Frigaard, former Deputy Prosecutor for Serious Crimes in East Timor and Chief Public Prosecutor for Organized and other Serious Crimes, Norway; Mohammed Ayat, Senior Legal Adviser, ICTR; Michael Th. Johnson, Registrar, War Crimes Chamber, Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Robert Pulver, Acting Chief, Criminal Law and Judicial Advisory Unit, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations; Robert Goldman, for-

mer President, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; Diane Orentlicher, former UN Independent Expert on Update of the UN Set of Principles for the Protection of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity; Susana SáCouto, Executive Director, WCRO.

³ In addition to the topics covered in this article, the conference included panel discussions on “The Relationship between Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and its Impact on the Promotion of International Criminal Justice” and “The Impact of International Criminal Justice Mechanisms on Peace Initiatives,” which are not specifically addressed in this piece due to editorial constraints.

⁴ *Inyenzi*, which means “cockroaches,” was widely understood to mean Tutsis. See Bill Berkley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full 2* (Basic Books 2001).

⁵ In 2004 Human Rights Watch accused the Rwandan Government of interpreting the law too broadly, enabling officials to label any opposition to the government as inciting “ethnic division.” *Rwanda: Kigali Directs Attorney General to Probe ‘Genocidal’ Groups*, UN IRIN News Agency (Sept. 24, 2004).

⁶ *The Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, principle 2*, U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1996/39 (1996).

⁷ See *Prosecutor v. Gotjko Jankovic*, Case No. IT-96-23/2-PT, Judgment (Apr. 19, 2004). Stankovic was a co-defendant in the case.