

**Statement of Attorney Ishmael Muhammad  
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On August 29, 2005 Katrina struck New Orleans and the Gulf Coast with the full force of a category 5 hurricane. Within hours flood waters would rush the City of New Orleans pouring out of an outdated levee system that, due to years of gross and blatant government neglect, was not prepared to withstand Katrina's powerful winds. Quickly these waters would find and swallow up the city's blackest and poorest communities. Indeed many reported hearing explosions before seeing the advancing waters. This has left some to conclude that the floods invaded some black communities and missed some white ones not by chance but by design.

For many there was a memory of 1927 when white business owners busted the levee in black areas in order to guide the water away from their businesses and affluent communities. This history supported the belief that Katrina flood waters found their way to the jet black ninth ward and East New Orleans by design.

Within days after Katrina struck, dead bodies, mostly black bodies, floated through the streets, as ambulances and helicopters rushed passed black and poor victims toward white and affluent communities, leaving predominantly black and poor people to fend for themselves.

The situation would produce countless acts of heroism and courage as men, women and children would reach out to each other and save the lives of family, friends and strangers as government agencies and the red cross either rushed to the aid of the affluent and the white or stood by as the devastation and disaster mushroomed. The survivors would seek refuge in the New Orleans Super Dome and at the Civic Center as they would gather and then wait for buses which took three, four and often five and six days to come. The people waited in dangerous and unhealthy conditions without clean clothing, water, electricity, toiletries, and often without food.

The major media would turn away, ignore or fail to show the peoples acts of courage and heroism and become preoccupied with what they termed acts of thugs. Although there were few if any gun shot casualties reported to any law enforcement or medical personnel, the media repeatedly ran stories on phantom shootings at police and medical aids by so called armed thugs, while broadcasting over and over again the same picture of the same few people carrying gym shoes, clothing, food, and in one case a T.V. from a few stores. To the major media, black people seeking and finding food from abandoned stores were looters, while whites doing the same were identified as having found food.

The Governor of Louisiana would call on State and local law enforcement to shoot to kill the so-called looters. The numbers of those gunned down by police and National Guards are suspected to be at least thirty (30). In Mississippi and New Orleans many were herded into jail with high bonds for petty larceny or on other exaggerated charges.

When the buses finally arrived, blacks and much of the poor were taken to so-called shelters and placed in concentration camp like conditions at gun point. Whites and the more affluent were transported to white churches and other facilities and shelters.

Across the country outrage has grown and still grows as the criminal indifference and mistreatment by the U. S. Government, FEMA, the Red Cross, State Governments, Local Governments and others towards the survivors and victims of hurricane Katrina became and still becomes more and more apparent.

The outrageousness of the behavior of these Governments and agencies becomes even more obvious as Katrina survivors have been left with little to no money, without homes, jobs and dignity and some without their children who can be found but inexplicably remain unaccounted for while adequate help has not been given nor genuine concern been shown. Survivors seeking help have been shuffled from the Red Cross, to FEMA, to insurance companies and back to the Red Cross again without receiving any assistance and have received little relief elsewhere, and full recovery is nowhere in sight. The insurance companies refuse to pay for home and other property loss, FEMA pays too little, too slow, and sometimes not at all. Large numbers of Red Cross workers are reported to be racist, often dishonest, and unreliable at best. The U.S. Government, the State and Local governments involved, and big time money changers go forward on plans to rebuild New Orleans without most of its displaced black and poor populations at the table or represented in any meaningful way. Meanwhile hundreds of Katrina survivors linger in jail charged with a variety of illegitimate charges, and well over 1,000 families have to bury their dead as a result of Katrina and the government's brutal neglect, yet no compensation has been offered to any of our families for the lives lost or has even been seriously considered.

The burden of human suffering and dire financial conditions will once again weigh on the backs of a nation of black and poor people that already has millions suffering in poverty, prison and jails, many being held as political prisoners. This cross is to be carried by a nation of people already owed reparation for centuries of slave trade, slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, discrimination and countless other acts of lawlessness.

Remembering the horrors of Katrina and the history of racial and class oppression is not enough. The time has come to turn outrage to action.

On December 8, 2005 through December 10, 2005 scores of survivors and their supporters (people who believe in freedom and justice) will gather in Jackson, MS and New Orleans. We will gather for the National State of Emergency Conference in Jackson on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of December. Supporters and representatives and leaders from over 50 black organizations, labor unions, and third world and anti-racists activists will meet in support and solidarity of a survivor initiated action plan to aid in rescuing victims of the Katrina disaster and all oppressed populations from their dependency on racially biased and incompetent government entities who protect the interest of the wealthy at the expense of the poor. **Most importantly, the Katrina Survivors will gather at the same place and time to form a General Assembly to speak for themselves and to exercise their right to self determination.**

Survivors have raised demands for immediate jobs, education, housing, clothing and food. Survivors have made the demand to place the control and direction of Gulf Coast reconstruction in their hands. Survivors demand the opportunity to exercise the right to return to the Gulf Coast with dignity and without poverty. Survivors have demanded a complete investigation into and prosecution of all government agencies for crimes against humanity and human rights violations.