

AGFE MISSION

Advisory Group on Forced Evictions to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

City/ country	New Orleans, USA
Mission dates	26–31 July 2009
Head of mission	Leilani Farha, AGFE member, executive director of the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
AGFE Members participating in the mission	Leticia Marques Osorio, AGFE member, Senior Legal Officer of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), London, UK
Other mission participants/ organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiffany M. Gardner, Director Human Right to Housing Programme, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI); • Sam Jackson, co-founder Mayday New Orleans; • Eric Tars, Human Rights Programme Director, Children and Youth Attorney, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Washington, DC.
Request for mission	On 27 th March of 2008, a message from NESRI's director, Mrs. Tiffany M. Gardner, makes an elaborated request justifying why an AGFE mission should be organised. This was addressed to Yves Cabannes, AGFE chairperson, and forwarded to AGFE secretariat. Mission included in plan of activities approved by the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT.
Local context / eviction parameters	<p>The hurricane Katrina that stroke late August 2005 left a path of destruction, displacing more than 2 million people in the Gulf coast region. The city of New Orleans was hard hit and placed under mandatory evacuation. Many residents were relocated to nearby States.</p> <p>No official government review or assessment of the post-Katrina social economic condition had been issued. Various independent reports highlighted the lack of or insufficient support to homeowners seeking to rebuild their home and livelihoods and the lack of affordable housing options for renters with poorer segments of the population who are facing serious hardship. Reports on housing rights, and human rights violations triggered public outcry and grassroots complaints. The city council approved the demolition of 4,500 public housing units and redevelopment is targeting replacement/reconstruction of lesser units thus excluding large parts of the original population, the majority being low-income and from minority groups. Forecasts indicate a loss of 3,750 units of public housing. Homelessness in the city is estimated at 12,000 people, double the number prior to Katrina. Housing vouchers (individual rent subsidy) has been reduced in 2/3 of the level prior to Katrina. A medical complex being planned is likely to evict homeowners with the consequent seizure of private property, up to 25 square blocks and 165 historic homes to be demolished. Alternatives offered by residents have been ignored by government officials. Residents have not received assistance to re-establish livelihoods and restitution of housing or compensation for the loss of adequate housing.</p>
Main findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The storm damaged 51,000 rental housing. • Average rents in New Orleans are now 52% higher than it was during pre-Katrina. • There is a serious threat of mass evictions. Forced evictions have already occurred. More than 1,000 well-structured public housing units have been demolished already without the provision of alternative housing for those originally living there. • A town hall meeting to receive AGFE mission attracted 200 residents and community leaders, with 30 of them providing their own testimony about forced evictions. • There has been inadequate government support to enable former residents to return and/or to rebuild their homes and livelihood. • Affordable housing options have severely decreased and government planning is not rewarding low-income residents.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment plans are further enlarging demolition and promoting large-scale eviction, with drastic consequences for residents should they be implemented as planned. • The implementation of a medical centre is likely to increase loss of Housing; • There is little public consultation by government. Suggestions by residents and grassroots organisations are not taken seriously by government. • The homeless population has more than doubled in post Katrina. • Post Katrina reconstruction provides less affordable housing opportunities – less private market rental units, less public housing, less individual rent subsidies (Section 8 vouchers) which excludes large groups of population that are particularly vulnerable, namely low-income households, African Americans, single mother tenants. These groups are particularly affected and are denied their right to adequate housing. • Government's decision to demolish public housing and replace them on a 1:3 ratio rather than 1:1 ratio affect predominantly African-Americans and women-headed households. • Low-income and Black residents are reporting worse health after the hurricane, with some living in abandoned buildings particularly more affected. • There is a lack of engagement of all levels of government with New Orleans's low-income residents about the future of their housing. • Policies, measures and actual practices have a subtle discriminatory character by excluding typically the most vulnerable ones. • Government officials involved in the design and implementation of housing policies as well as residents have little knowledge about the international human rights covenants, international instruments and principles. • Residents from certain areas of the city such as Lower Mid-City, Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, are confronted with severe obstacles to rebuild their homes and livelihoods. Additionally, demolition of public housing schemes such as B.W. Copper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard impact on 14,000 families, close to 49,000 individuals and causing forced internal displacements.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN-HABITAT to conduct an assessment of New Orleans's master plan from a human rights perspective; • UN-HABITAT to promote meaningful public consultation in order to enable residents to discuss their housing needs and become partners of government in rebuilding their city. • UN-HABITAT to encourage US government to pursue inclusive post-disaster policies and strategies that recognise the rights of those most affected and most vulnerable groups, and particularly advise HUD, State Secretary for Housing and Urban Development, to engage local residents in the process. • UN-HABITAT to continue working with residents' organisations that are active in the post-Katrina reconstruction and promote participatory and inclusive ways forward, ensuring mechanisms to monitor progress; • UN-HABITAT to encourage the US government to ratify the international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. • UN-HABITAT to recommend the US government to recognise, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing for those mostly affected by hurricane Katrina; • UN-HABITAT to recommend the US government to adopt the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Pinheiro Principles in order to create a new and exemplary post-disaster recovery.
Outcomes and follow-up activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AGFE mission received wide press coverage from national and state/local press, triggering interest and responsiveness from local, state and federal government agencies; • Television footages of different TV networks reporting on the AGFE mission increased opportunities for many residents and community leaders to voice their concerns, disappointment and their disapproval for the loss of affordable housing and the on-going evictions; • The findings of AGFE mission and the press and TV coverage has assisted the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing when planning and implementing its mission to US (October 2009).

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS		
New Orleans		
Sun, 26 July		Orientation to Mission
	17:00	Panel discussion and town hall meeting
		Mission Team daily wrap-up meeting
Mon, 27 July	am	Mr. Michael P., Homeless Person Martha Kegel, Shamus Rohn, Michael Miller, UNITY of Greater New Orleans Ms. Naomi B., Ms. Grace B., Homeless Persons
	pm	Tour of Mid City led by Committee to Reopen Charity Hospital
		Mission Team daily wrap-up meeting
Tues, 28 July		Visits to demolished public housing sites and other locations to meet with displaced former residents, guided by members of Mayday New Orleans and Survivors Village
Wed, 29 July		Meeting with New Orleans officials
	10:00	Anthony Faciane, Deputy Chief for Development, Mayor's Office
	11:30	Deborah Langhoff, Chief of Staff, New Orleans City Council Chair Fielkow,
Washington, DC		
Thu, 30 July		Meeting with federal officials in Washington, DC
	11:20	Rep. Joseph Cao (LA)
	12:00	Janet Woodka, Fed. Coordinator for Gulf Coast Recovery
	13:00	Sen. Landrieu (LA) Homeland Security Staff
	14:15	House Financial Services Committee Staff
	15:15	Rep. Waters (CA) & Charla Oueratani, Housing Staff
	16:00	Rep. Artur Davis (AL)
	16:00	HUD Asst. Sec. Sandra Henriquez, Fred Tumbar,
Fri, 31 July		Meetings with federal officials in Washington, DC
	13:00	White House Office of Management & Budget Director Xavier de Souza Briggs

